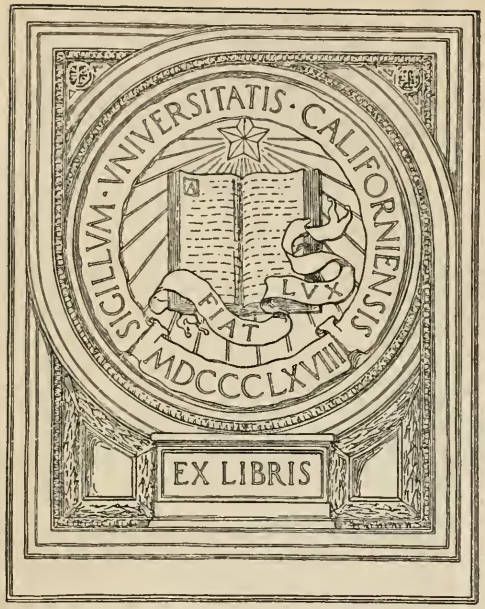
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UNDER THE LENS
AND OTHER STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SHAPING OF LAVINIA

IN ACTION

BATTLEWRACK

ACCORDING TO ORDERS

ON THE BORDERLAND

UNDER THE LENS

AND OTHER STORIES :: :: ::

By F. BRITTEN AUSTIN :: ::

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TO

TIBBO

IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE

THESE STORIES IN WHICH SHE HAS A PART

591521

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These stories have already appeared in England in the pages of the *Strand Magazine, Nash's Magazine, London Magazine, Good-Housekeeping* and *Pears' Annual* for 1922, and in America in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *International* and the *Red Book Magazines*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. To the editors of all these periodicals I tender my acknowledgments.

UNDER THE LENS

Under the Lens

THE talk in our corner of the club gathered itself suddenly into a common focus. The waiter had brought over the evening papers, filled with the last phases of a sensational murder-trial and headlined with the verdict—a death-sentence.

One of us—Collins, unsentimental, like the lawyer he was—curtly expressed the opinion that the fellow had got his deserts. Fergusson, the only medico in our coterie of assorted professionals, of course took him up at this (they lost no opportunity of chipping at each other) and promptly challenged, in pseudo-serious protest, the competence of Collins, or indeed any one of us, to pronounce on any man's deserts. He justified his provocative argument by a neat little exposition of the obscurities of human psychology.

"None of your psycho-analytic profundities, doctor!" It was Thompson who protested. "Keep to things the plain man can understand."

"I'll try," submitted Fergusson, with a factitious humility that did not conceal the twinkle behind his pince-nez. "But you would none of you be the worse for a little intellectual exercise. However, there's nothing beyond average comprehension in my remarks. All I'm trying to do is to give you a glimpse of human beings as they really are—machines in subtle inter-reaction with a highly-variable point of consciousness which is itself the effective end of a vast, extraordinarily complicated mass of psychic impulses, inhibitions and conflicts altogether unsuspected by the individual himself."

" Thank you, doctor ! " laughed Thompson, " no plain man can have the smallest excuse for failing to understand you fully."

" Don't take any notice of him, Doc ! " said McIlwraith. " He's but an ignorant, dull-witted Saxon ! Let's see what you're driving at."

" Merely at opening your eyes for a minute or two," smiled Fergusson. " Here you are, all of you, going about the world and taking each other at face-value, passing glib judgments on each other, even *bored* with each other—when, in fact, you are moving about in perpetual contact with the most fascinating of mysteries—you are each of you an unfathomable mystery yourself. What are you? You think you are just yourselves. Think again ! How many ancestors have each of us had in the millions of years between us and the arboreal simian ? They are beyond computation, tangled in an inextricable confusion of intermarriage. Those innumerable ancestors, yours and mine, comprise every possible variety of human type—saint and sinner, cowards, murderers, heroes, idealists, martyrs, parasites, emperors and slaves—everything you can think of. Every crime that was ever committed, every virtue that ever ennobled humanity, has been incarnated, not once, but over and over again, in those countless forebears who live again in you. You are all compact of their conflicting characteristics."

" And you assert as a scientific fact," demanded Collins, " that none of those strains ever dies out ? "

" Some--differing in all of us—are pushed into the background and remain latent," replied Fergusson. " But the psychologist, digging into the human mind, can point to strata that are older than humanity itself. The biologist, Weissman—I don't suppose you have read his ' Germ-Plasm '—likewise asserts that you carry in your body a microscopically minute but highly vital speck of protoplasm that has lived immortally, handed down from generation to generation, modified to some extent by each, imposing its latent characteristics upon the organism in which it dwells, a focus-point of converging lines of descent, from perhaps the very beginning of organic life itself."

" I don't quite see where all this is tending," said Thompson. " We're a long way from that murder-case, or whatever it was we started from."

" Not so far," said the doctor. " I merely protested against glibly superficial judgments on our fellow-creatures, and I've tried to give you a hint of my reasons. We look at life with blind eyes—just, for example, as we look at, say, yeast in ferment. To the unaided vision a lump of yeast is simply a mass of dirty-coloured substance that boils over by some inexplicable innate property of its own. Put it under a microscope and you get at least a step nearer the heart of the mystery—the lens reveals the swarming millions of bacteria which are at work to produce the phenomenon. Think, if we could only put human creatures under such a lens—a psychological one, making plain all the myriad germs of impulse which are latent or potential in them ! "

" Fascinating—but impossible ! " said one of us.

" Quite impossible," agreed Fergusson. " You can never know all the factors."

" Not impossible to a clever fellow like you, surely ! " said Collins, with mock incredulity.

" Much obliged for the compliment," returned Fergusson, imperturbably. " But even I, immense as my knowledge must seem to your ignorance," he smiled blandly, " have something less than universal vision. But I don't mind admitting that I have, from time to time, amused myself with an attempt to put my fellow-creatures under the microscope—within the limits of the possible, of course. Do you remember that Warburton case, Collins ? "

" Fellow who shot the husband of a woman he was in love with—practically no defence," answered Collins promptly.

" You've summed it up admirably—just as the judge and jury saw it," said Fergusson. " That case to-night reminded me of it. I was an expert witness in the Warburton affair—a purely negative one on the question of insanity—and my own private elucidation was, of course, judicially worthless and not even put forward by the defence. But I could not help thinking how different

things looked from the standpoint of the judge and jury as compared with even the limited amount of magnification I was able to bring in this particularly instance upon—shall we call it, the bacteria in the yeast ? "

" It sounds interesting," remarked McIlwraith critically. " Go ahead ! "

" Oh, I'm not going to tell you the story," said Fergusson. " At least "—he hesitated, his eyes twinkling—" not without a Havana at your expense. This one's finished." He threw away the stub.

McIlwraith answered by calling up the waiter. Fergusson carefully selected one of the largest and most expensive brands, with a pious deprecation of such extravagance on the part of a fellow Scotsman.

" I want that story," said McIlwraith. " And I've paid for it—so start right in ! "

" Well, I suppose I am under contract," said the doctor, lighting his cigar. " But don't expect too much. It's merely a yarn of murder—under the lens of an imperfect psychological analysis."

" Go ahead—fire away," we said encouragingly, thrilling pleasantly with a sense of mysteries to be unveiled.

Fergusson considered his cigar for a moment or two.

" You all remember the case, of course," he said, looking up. " It caused a sensation at the time. Chisholm Warburton, a young man of good family, with a personal record that was blameless to the point of austerity, shot and killed a certain Mike Haverfield—a gentleman who lived expensively by his wits. There were a good many young men who had played cards with Mr. Haverfield—a very costly amusement, by the way—but Warburton was not one of them. It was difficult to assign any reason for personal animus between the two men, except the one alleged by the prosecution—that Warburton was in love with Haverfield's wife. But the prosecution could prove no intrigue, for the simple reason that no intrigue existed. Warburton was an ascetically moral young man. Reason or no reason, however—his excuse that he acted in protection of Mrs. Haverfield was dismissed as insufficient—he frankly admitted having shot Mike Haverfield.

"The Judge, I think, fairly summed up the case as it appeared to him. He said something like this before he proceeded to sentence—'Prisoner at the bar, you confess to having wantonly, on what you describe as a blind, uncontrollable impulse, shot the man Haverfield. You can urge nothing sufficient in extenuation of that crime. Your sanity has never been in question. Whatever may be the real reasons, known only to yourself, which urged you to this dreadful act, they cannot palliate it. You have brought disgrace—and I think that this aggravates your crime, if anything can aggravate it—upon a family that for generations has held high among its fellow-men an exalted ideal of conduct. From their graves they must cry out upon you——'

"That judge had a weakness for the picturesque, but it was no unfair comment. The Warburton family, in fact, from that Roundhead ancestor who was a friend of Hampden and of Prynne, had kept alive a very conscious tradition of private morality and public example. In almost every generation, it had produced a preacher, a philanthropist or a social reformer—all of the distinctly Puritan type. Sitting there in the court, we could almost see those sternly righteous ancestors rising in indignant repudiation of their last degenerate descendant, this young man who listened, with bowed head, without excuse, to the scathing condemnation of the judge. The whole court, I think, felt a wave of sudden, blind resentment in sympathy with those outraged ghosts. I almost felt it myself—and then I caught myself smiling with a perception of grim irony. I saw some ghosts that neither judge nor prisoner guessed at.

"Both judge and prisoner alike looked back in imagination upon a line of severely impeccable moralists now dishonoured. To the one, the crime was inexcusable. To the other, it was really inexplicable. Neither knew, neither could possibly suspect, the subtle influence which had flared suddenly into this disaster. I'll try to reconstruct for you, under that lens we spoke of, the story of the crime as it appeared to me.

"I want you to see that young man as he stood in the dock, not—as he imagined himself—a brand-new created

individual, modified only by his immediate environment, but as he really was—the focus-point of innumerable ancestral tendencies alive in him, each and all striving for expression.

"A man's own body is not his own. Every characteristic: his nose, his mouth, the colour of his eyes, the proportions of his limbs, even his resistance to disease, is the inherited reminiscence of an ancestor. Every bit of that young man's physical tissue was conditioned by his inheritance from a phalanx of ancestors stretching away in ever-broadening multitudes from yesterday's civilisation to beyond savagery. His mental make-up, quite unknown to himself, was a similar compound of inherited impulses and associations. His own will?"—Fergusson turned to meet McIlwraith's murmured objection—"A man's own will, in so far as that is not a self-created illusion, reacts against some of his inherited impulses and accepts and puts new force into others.

"What a man's spirit is in itself, I don't pretend to say. No one has solved that problem. But the point to remember is that this selective point of consciousness which a man calls himself is an infinitely sensitive and, within limits, variable thing. Weather, for example, will affect it. Even Collins here is a different man in an east wind! Young Warburton's point of consciousness, throughout the quarter-century of life since he had emerged from babyhood, had conscientiously made its selections in accordance with a high code of ethics. He could scarcely have framed a criticism of himself.

"In this, he was a worthy descendant of all the ancestors of whom he knew anything. From father to son, the Warburtons had passed on their carefully-guarded lamp of virtue. Repression of all the wilder instincts must itself have become almost an instinct with them. They married women of either congenial or adaptable temperament. At any rate, the rigid uniformity of type does not appear to have been modified by these importations into the stock. Of the ancestral potentialities of the Warburton wives for the past hundred years, I can tell you nothing. Their dossiers are blank, but potentialities they must have had.

In that phalanx of ghosts behind Chisholm Warburton there were many with veiled faces.

"The Warburton records are monotonous in their consistent reproduction of the dominant type. (I delved into them pretty deeply, I may say, for my own interest.) I had to go back nearly eighty years before I came across the first black sheep, a younger son who kicked over the traces and disappeared, after a career of dissipation in the Paris of the forties. My interest quickened as Chisholm Warburton told me of this bad hat—the family still kept his moral skeleton in the cupboard as a kind of bogey, it appeared, for the admonishment of their young. I welcomed him like a detective does his first clue.

"What was the explosive material behind this startling divergence from type? The father of this young reprobate, I discovered, was one of Wellington's Presbyterian colonels. He marched to Paris in 1815 with his victorious general and remained with the Army of Occupation for a good many months. Whilst in Paris he evidently experienced that occasional violent attraction of opposites for each other which is one of Nature's compensating principles. This grimly pious old soldier fell in love with, of all people, a dancer at the Opera, a Mdlle. Courtois, and married her. Now, Mdlle. Courtois herself is not particularly remarkable. She was apparently reformed and absorbed by the dominant Warburton type; one hears no more of her.

"But go back one step further. Her father flames out like a conflagration in the night. Courtois *père* was a member of the revolutionary tribunal during the Terror, and Lenôtre has made him the subject of one of his vivid little studies in the period. In that mob of sanguinary ruffians who preyed on France, he certainly had equals but no superior. There is a portrait-sketch of him in the French National Archives—a leering, wicked face under the red Phrygian cap that seems stained with the blood he shed. The man was a homicidal maniac realising a madman's dream of unrestrained assassination. Thanks to Lenôtre, his antecedents are known. He was the son of a criminal hanged for murder, and an Italian dancing-girl. The mother of that Italian girl you will find mentioned in

Casanova and other of the eighteenth century *chroniques scandaleuses.*

" Here was a pretty dash of scarlet staining the drab succession of the Warburton respectability ! Dour old Colonel Warburton little dreamed with what a price he purchased from the devil the soul of that charming little Parisian ballet-dancer. Chisholm himself, of course, had no idea of that leering blood-stained ruffian with the red cap dangling over his ear who stood in the shadowy phalanx of his ancestors. I spared him the shock of what to him would have been a most humiliating and disturbing revelation.

" I won't weary you with particulars of the earlier Warburton genealogy. It is devoid of any human note. But the details I have inflicted on you are indispensable. We're identifying a few of the bacteria in the yeast.

" So far as Chisholm Warburton was concerned, the story opened with the night young Everard Franklin came to him in his rooms.

" Everard was in bad trouble. He had been lured round to the Haverfield's apartment by the fascinating Mrs. Haverfield—Warburton had frowned at this—had played cards with Mike Haverfield and had left behind him not only all his cash but a cheque that could not be met. An ugly scandal threatened him. Would Chisholm help ? Warburton, who had inherited to the full the ancestral instinct for moral salvage, having exacted a pledge from young Franklin to abjure such company henceforth, promised to do his best. The ironic fates which set the trap for him baited it well. You could always appeal to the Warburton conscious sense of altruism.

" Chisholm, of course, kept his word. It was late the next afternoon when he was ushered into a luxurious apartment and left alone to await Mr. Haverfield who would, said the servant, be with him in two minutes. There was something in the atmosphere of the place, he told me, that made him feel subtly uneasy. It was furnished in a taste altogether alien to his upbringing, more like a voluptuous boudoir than a reception-room, the air impregnated with an evasive scent, the walls hung with eighteenth-century

prints of shepherds and shepherdesses in languid dalliance. He remembered suddenly that Everard had said that Mrs. Haverfield was really French. The fact presented itself to him as an explanation of his environment. He hoped, with a curiously emphatic little aversion, that he should not meet her.

"Chisholm Warburton, although nearly thirty, had always instinctively held himself aloof from women. He did not care for them, he said. Such an instinctive avoidance—whether of women or wine or what-not—is generally pretty sure proof of a danger-spot subconsciously guarded. The Warburton habits of repression had kept the nigger sitting on the safety-valve for a good many generations, remember, and Chisholm's nigger was a particularly stout fellow. Withholding himself for an austerely refined ideal of marriage which no woman had yet incarnated, he had never allowed himself to kiss a girl in his life. As he stood there—a virile, rather handsome figure of stern, uncompromising virtue, resolved to deal faithfully with the knavish Mr. Haverfield—he experienced none of that pleasant little thrill of anticipation with which the unregenerate would have contemplated the possibility of meeting a woman so fascinating as Everard had alleged Mrs. Haverfield to be. He felt, on the contrary, a distinct hostility to her in the abstract.

"A moment later, and the curtain over the door was drawn aside. He found himself staring at a tall, dark, startlingly beautiful woman who stood, gowned in a rich and vivid red, against the dark hangings she had let fall behind her. The entire apartment was suddenly an artistically-staged background for her; everything found its justification in her appearance. He remembered Everard's enthusiastic description as he stared at her—the face of a Madonna! A pair of lustrously liquid dark eyes looked at him from the ivory-pale oval under her massed hair—eyes that seemed full of unutterable significances remote from the sordid world. She smiled, and it was almost a shock to him. Her voice as she spoke was tinged with a foreign accent, rich and deep.

"'Mr. Warburton?' she said. The commonplace

enquiry seemed charged with an esoteric value as she uttered it.

" He bowed a stiff acknowledgment, explained, with an ungracious note in his voice which surprised himself, that he was awaiting Mr. Haverfield. That ungracious note was eloquent if he had but known it. The Warburton instincts asserted themselves harshly over an obscure commotion in the depths of him. He told me that it was as if someone asleep in him had suddenly waked up, to be held down by a firm and unseen hand. The touch of foreignness in his environment seemed oddly familiar to him, as if he had been there before——

" ' Mr Haverfield will be here presently,' said the woman, her smile seeming for the moment to illumine the brooding mystery in her eyes. Her tone was vibrant in him, as though he were a silent instrument with a string keyed to the same pitch as the voice that spoke. ' Won't you sit down ? '

" He did so awkwardly, following her example, feeling himself, as he said, an uncouth crop-eared Puritan, absurdly intolerant of the refinement which was the blameless associate of vice, under the calm scrutiny of those inscrutable eyes.

" That was a curious little note of self-criticism to make itself heard in him. Looked at through our lens, the bacteria in the yeast were multiplying themselves suddenly in a point of ferment. Can you identify the germ ? Chisholm Warburton knew nothing of that arch-great-grandmother, effaced in her Scottish Presbyterian home, who had ached with nostalgia for the glamour of the footlights and the little *soupers intimes* at the Café Voisin. He found himself without a word to say to this beautiful creature who sat like a Madonna with mystically enigmatic eyes in front of him. He was suddenly resentful of—of the little stirrings in his blood.

" ' You have business with my husband ? ' she asked, startling him again with the measured richness of that slightly foreign tone.

" He brought himself to speech. ' I have come on behalf of Mr. Everard Franklin,' he said, with a bluntness that annoyed himself.

" She smiled, wistfully, helplessly pathetic.

" ' That poor young Mr. Everard ! ' she exclaimed in full, deep commiseration, piquant with the French tang. ' He has been losing money to my husband ?—Oh ! ' her regret voiced itself in the exclamation, profoundly sincere, —' And I warned him ! '

" It was true. She had warned him ! Everard had said so. Involuntarily, he seized on the exculpation with an immense relief. That pure oval face, with the unfathomable eyes, eloquent of things sublimely higher than sordid gambling squabbles, could not—it was impossible—mask the willing participant of vice ! He saw suddenly not an accomplice but a silent, tragic victim. Some infernal wickedness held her to the man Haverfield, he was sure of it. A romance, Andromeda-patterned, formed itself in his mind. It was on the tip of his tongue—himself a knight-errant prompt for rescue at all costs (that Presbyterian colonel behind the scenes of the Opera must have known the feeling)—to appeal to her for confirmation. Something in him checked the question, substituted another.

" ' You are French, madam ? ' he asked lamely enough.

" She smiled with her answer, winningly frank. ' Yes. Do you know France ? My own name was Lavoisière.'

" The name meant nothing to him. But Lenôtre, in his study of the red-capped ruffian Courtois, has a curious little story of an aristocrat named Lavoisière condemned by his infamous tribunal who, as he was dragged from the court to the guillotine, turned and shouted : ' Scoundrel, my blood shall come and call for yours ! ' I doubt whether Chisholm Warburton had ever heard of his arch-great-grandmother's father, who died, despite this unamiable prophecy, quite peacefully as the Mayor of a commune under the Empire.

" The conversation terminated there. The next moment the hangings over the door parted again and Warburton found himself confronting Haverfield.

" A violent antipathy leaped up automatically in him as his eyes fell on the white, mean little face with the turned-up black moustache. He said the man looked at him like a carrion-fed rat. To Warburton, he was instinctively

vermin deserving only extermination—he held your theory of a man's *deserts*, Collins—and he found it difficult to talk to him with patience. Warburton could not see—as we see them under our lens—that Haverfield also was the unwitting focus-point of generations of an ancestry held rat-like from the sun in the dark prison-cells of every variety of penal code, that he—as well as that crimson-gowned woman who looked upon them with unfathomable eyes from the pale purity of her face—that Warburton himself—the trio who stood there in a juxtaposition of latent drama—were virtually automata swayed by instincts and impulses beyond their ken.

" Haverfield was stubbornly obdurate when it came to business. He had accepted Everard Franklin's cheque believing him to be a man of honour. They had played cards as between gentlemen—can you imagine the Warburton disgust at this profanation of their sacred ideal?—and as between gentlemen such obligations must be met. Of course, if Everard Franklin was only a common little swindler—Warburton nearly struck him in the face—then he must be dealt with by the processes of the law. It was a serious matter to give worthless cheques, particularly when one received a balance of cash in exchange for them.

" Mrs. Haverfield stood in silence, her dark eyes enigmatically fixed upon the young man, the fine virility of his well-cut features touched into a subtle accentuation of appeal by the suggestion of asceticism in the lines of cheek and mouth, who argued, with temperate firmness, his side of the case. Warburton contemptuously avoided the pretence of an appeal to honour. He based his argument upon a plain business proposition. No matter what Haverfield did, Everard Franklin's cheque would not be met. The sensible thing for Haverfield to do was to accept his, Warburton's, cheque for a percentage of the amount. He, Warburton, in fact, would buy back a worthless piece of paper. Haverfield laughed the idea to scorn, professed to consider Warburton as an accomplice in a fraud.

" In the instant in which Warburton was mastering his temper, Mrs. Haverfield interposed.

" ' I think, Mike,' she said, and the name lost its vulgarity

in the piquantly foreign charm of her tone, 'you ought to accept the proposal Mr. Warburton is generous enough to offer on behalf of his friend.' Her eyes swept round upon him. Was there sympathy, understanding, in them? Something obscure in him leaped up, claiming an allegiance with her. A Warburton censor relaxed its suspicion. She turned again to her husband. 'Mr. Warburton may do you the injustice of thinking that you exploited the weaknesses of young Mr. Franklin.'

"Something assured Warburton that she was diplomatically playing his game. He remained silent. Haverfield relaxed grudgingly.

"'Well, Renée,' he said, 'if you wish it——'

"'I do!' she urged, in earnest entreaty.

"'Very well, then,' He turned to Warburton. 'I accept your offer. But I can't give you the cheque to-day. It is at the bank. Let me have your address and I will send it round to-morrow in exchange for your own. And you can't say I haven't met you fairly.'

"Mrs. Haverfield's eyes dwelt upon Warburton, exchanged an almost imperceptible glance of mutual comprehension.

"Warburton gave his address, and left.

"The next afternoon Warburton's man announced a visitor—'A lady, sir—Mrs. Haverfield.'

"'Show her in,' said Warburton, rising with almost an involuntarily reflex action of his muscles. He checked a curious little stir within himself. It was absurd that he should feel a personal interest in this woman.

"Mrs. Haverfield entered. She was dressed in dark clothes, but (he remembered afterwards) there was a little touch of red about her somewhere. That touch of red woke a responsive note that lingered in him vaguely. He invited her to a comfortable seat.

"The business part of the interview was soon disposed of. She had brought Everard Franklin's cheque. He handed her his own in exchange for it. She put it in her bag and then sat looking at him in silence with those dark, unfathomable eyes, made no motion to go.

"There are moments when time seems arrested, the tick

of the clock no longer measuring the cumulative experience of the soul. In the silence of that room, that immobile woman sitting regarding him with eyes fixed mutely upon him: such a moment did this appear to Chisholm Warburton.

" He stood near her, oddly embarrassed, waited for words he felt were imminent. It seemed curiously to him that they were already old acquaintances, linked by a subtle, unspoken intimacy.

" The words came.

" ' I wonder what you think me ? ' she said, in her slow, deep, piquant tones. The eyes were suddenly pathetic, in unison with the sigh that escaped her.

" He hesitated. ' I don't quite know what to think,' he said at last, frankly.

" She sighed again. ' You think I am—my husband's accomplice ? ' she got the words out with difficulty, her eyes upon his face.

" This implicit avowal of Haverfield's dishonesty startled him, evoked an instantaneous background of horror for the hint of pathos in her beauty. The Andromeda-romance leaped from possibility into certainty. All that was Warburton in him was suddenly reinforced—the old colonel who had plucked a brand from the burning would have recognised his descendant—was suddenly vivified by a surge of unknown forces from deeps in himself. That nigger on the safety-valve had to sit tight in sternly maintained repression. Unsuspected instincts, eager for recognition at long last, boiled up in unseen ferment.

" ' But you're not ! ' he exclaimed. His voice betrayed an eagerness that amazed himself. He tried to attribute the timbre of that phrase, ringing in his ears long after she had gone, to his æsthetic intolerance of such exquisite beauty linked to such mean turpitude.

" ' Don't talk about it ! ' she said, her rich tones suddenly tremulous, and shuddered, pathetic eyes upon his face. ' There are things—things one cannot talk about ! ' There was a world of secret anguish in her sigh.

" ' But, surely ! ' he protested. ' You need not stay with him ! Something can be done ! '

" She shook her head hopelessly.

" ' Nothing, *mon ami!* '—she checked herself, smiled pitifully. ' You see I call you my friend—although we have but just met. But you understand. You are '—her eyes rested flatteringly upon the clean-cut virility of his head and figure—' *sympathique!* ' Her smile confessed her inability to find an exact English equivalent for the word.

" ' But,' he cried, and something in him failed to recognise this ardent transformation of himself, ' it is unthinkable that you should be tied to a man like that ! '

" Her gesture of the hand was eloquent.

" ' Sometimes it is almost more than I can bear,' she admitted, with what he honoured as a fine reluctance. ' But, what would you ?—it is my fate ! ' She shrugged her shoulders, rose from the chair. Her English lapsed quaintly into the unidiomatic, piquant with her accent. ' I must suffer it.' She held out her hand to him. ' You will come and see me—sometimes ? ' she asked, the wistful smile divorced from the gravity of her eyes.

" The Warburton cohorts marshalled themselves in his soul.

" ' Not unless I can help you,' he replied.

" ' Help me ! ' she echoed; shook her head. ' Ah ! No, that is impossible ! '

" She turned towards the door, stopped, held out her hand again.

" ' *Mon ami*, I will remember what you said.' Her voice was thrillingly contralto. ' If I should need your help—I will ask it.'

" He bowed over her hand, checked an insane impulse to kiss it as it lay between his fingers. He straightened himself, looked into her eyes.

" ' You may count on me,' he said, simply.

" The next moment she was gone, the room strangely empty.

" The remainder of that day was wasted for Warburton. He could settle to nothing. The night that followed was a purgatory of insomnia punctuated by startlingly vivid dreams. He told me some of them—those dramatic masquerades of secret desires and instincts, hitherto repressed, had acted themselves with such vehement force in the

theatre of his dream-consciousness as to leave an abiding impression on his memory—and were I to subject them to the Freudian method of psycho-analysis I could fill a book with the deductions they implied. Every element of his psychic entity, that compound of unknown inheritances of repulsions, sympathies, unsatisfied cravings and long-practised associations, had been wakened into unwonted activity by the mysterious reagent of a particular personal propinquity. You should be able to see for yourselves some of those ferments vitalised in the yeast.

" The next day he half-expected to see or hear of her. But there was silence and no sign. He jeered at himself, maintaining his lucidity; dissociated himself, with an exercise of his volition, from a problem that was no concern of his. The Warburton delicacy shrank from the sordid complications latent in the Haverfield ménage, asserting itself over the Warburton chivalry so prompt to act the knight-errant. Under both, something ached with a vague nostalgia. There was a fever in his blood that he would not confess to himself. Pervading him was an atmosphere of expectation, of imminent event.

" But the days passed, lengthened to a week, without hint of her. Deprived of stimulus, the ferment in him began to subside, disappointed elements to recede into obscurity. And yet something in him waited.

" The event came suddenly. Late on the seventh night, the sharp summons of his telephone-bell startled him from the book he was reading. He sprang across to the instrument—his heart seeming to check in the shock of an inexplicable certitude—lifted the receiver. He heard a voice—her voice !—there was no mistaking it, but gasping, choking, it seemed, with some violent emotion.

" ' Come ! ' it said. ' Come at once ! ' Her utterance was interrupted. He thought he caught the sound of a scuffle in that distant room. He heard a man's voice, vaguely, in an angry hoarseness—heard hers clearly curt, ' Get away ! Or I shoot ! ' and then with startling distinctness direct into his own ear, ' Oh, come ! . . . Save me ! . . . Ah, *amour de Dieu !* . . . ' The voice ceased abruptly on a sharp cry. There was silence.

" He threw down the receiver and dashed for the door, snatching up his hat as he went. The Haverfields' apartment was not a quarter of a mile away. In a few seconds he was in the street. A minute later he was in a taxi racing at furious speed along a clear road. Three minutes—and a bell in the Haverfield flat was ringing violently under the frenetic pressure of his fingers. It seemed not himself, but a strange Warburton that raged impatiently at that closed door. This was an unknown self of primitive passions, suddenly released, sweeping through him like a storm in the night. The door opened—a scared maid-servant behind it. He pushed past her, went swiftly as by instinct to the room in which he had originally been received.

" He flung open the door. The room was in full light—cushions, hangings strewn about the floor, the overturned telephone trailing its cord across the divan, and beyond, shrinking into a corner, her hands still half-up in an instinctive guard to her face, the woman in the gown of rich and vivid red. Standing away from her, in an attitude of interrupted menace, was Haverfield, a riding-whip in his hand. Upon a table near the telephone a silver-plated revolver gleamed under an electric-lamp.

" Both of them turned at his irruption: the woman with a glad cry, the man with an angry snarl.

" ' What is all this? ' demanded Warburton, his voice quivering, strange in his own ears.

" ' She tried to shoot me, the she-devil! ' replied Haverfield, beside himself with fury, indicating the revolver on the table. ' But what's that to you, anyway? What's your business? '

" ' My business is to protect this woman! ' answered Warburton. It seemed that the whole of himself was molten into unison as he uttered the explicit definition.

" The little white face with the turned-up black moustache seemed to flame evilly as it glared at him.

" ' Beat it! ' he said hoarsely, pointing to the door with his riding-whip. ' Beat it while the going's good! '

" ' No! ' The woman almost screamed her appeal. ' No! Don't go! Don't leave me with him! Look—look

what he has done ! ' She dropped the hand from her face, revealed a great red weal, ugly across neck and bosom.

" ' You cad ! ' cried Warburton, in a fury of indignation that swept up from the depths of him. ' You deserve to be flogged for that ! ' In just such accents had that old colonel formulated his wrath in the days when flogging was the panacea in Wellington's army.

" ' *You* won't do it ! ' Haverfield sneered at him. ' Get out—quick ! And as for this woman—she's mine !—and I'll do what I like with her ! ' He raised his whip in menace.

" The woman shrank back with a cry of terror.

" ' Drop that ! ' commanded Warburton.

" Haverfield's answer was a sickening, vicious lash across the head guarded by the quivering hands.

" Warburton himself did not quite know what happened next. He saw red, as he expressed it. A sudden overmastering impulse to inflict death—a lust for annihilation of this evil thing—a savage lust for blood—blood shed by himself—leaped up in him. His ears sang, the room went blurry, he saw only that white vicious face shrinking back in startled alarm—he scarcely realised that he had snatched up the revolver.

" As it detonated deafeningly under the pressure of his finger on the trigger, he had—he puzzled over it afterwards—a queer little mental picture of a guillotine silhouetted against a blood-red sky.

" He explained this fleeting little hallucination himself to me as an immediate reaction of his own conscience, an involuntary spontaneous visualisation of the retribution he incurred, perverted, dream-like, with memories of the book on the French Revolution he had been reading.

" That's as it may be—but if there are such things as ghosts, other than those we carry in ourselves, I think the leering, evil countenance of Courtois under his red cap looked out at the elbow of young Chisholm Warburton as he stood on trial for his life in that gloomy court. And from the witness-box where Mrs. Haverfield gave evidence, the spectre of that guillotined aristocrat Lavoisière made him, perhaps, an ironic bow."

" And Mrs. Haverfield ? " interjected Thomspon. " Was she in love with young Warburton ? "

Dr. Fergusson smiled grimly. " She had another lover. That was what the row was about. She married him afterwards."

" And Warburton ? Hanged, I suppose ? "

" No," he said. " We haven't quite done with heredity. You remember young Warburton ' saw red ' at the fatal crisis ? That is almost literally true. Warburton—I diagnosed it the first time I saw him in his cell—suffered from a cerebral aneurism, a dilatation of an artery in the brain. The sudden increase of blood pressure on the wave of a strong emotion was liable to set up motor impulses far more powerful than the normal. More than that, his life was lived under a menace of which he was happily unconscious. It was an inherited trait. Several of his forbears had died as though poleaxed by the sudden rupture of an aneurism.

" I watched him as he stood there in the dock and listened to the judge's pitiless summing-up. His face went white and red with shame as those immaculate ancestors were recalled. I saw the vein on his forehead swell out suddenly, the blood-vessels of his neck get congested in the surge of his bitter emotion as the arraignment proceeded. Then, without warning, he went down as though he were shot. The strain was too great. The aneurism had burst. For once, his heredity was merciful. Well, Mr. McIlwraith, it lasted longer than your cigar—but there's your story ! "

" I don't like it," said McIlwraith. " It makes a man feel unsafe. I'm going to look up my family tree."

" Rubbish ! " commented Collins, with judicial asperity. " If wicked ancestors influenced us, we should all be hanged for murder."

AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR

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Major Bruce, G.S.O. (Intelligence), Headquarters Staff of the strategically-important far-Eastern base of Menangpore, was suddenly jerked out of the blissful Nirvana of his afternoon siesta to resumption of his temporarily forgotten identity. The telephone-bell was ringing. He slid off his couch, in shirt and breeches, and went to the instrument.

"Hallo! Yes?" He listened. "Oh, hallo, Rolfe! What?—General wants to see me?—Right-o! I'll be along."

A minute or two later, girt once more in the official harness of Sam Browne over white tunic, his pith-helmet large over his deep-tanned, efficient-looking features, he emerged from the shutter-darkened cool of his bungalow into the blinding glare of a 4 p.m. sun. He turned along the white road, inadequately shaded between its rows of stiff-fronded palms, which led, beyond the bungalows of the married officers, to Garrison Headquarters. A couple of native soldiers, solemnly stupid with a hose-pipe, were getting gloriously wet as they changed its thick dust into mud that dried again behind them before they had moved on a dozen steps.

He frowned. But it was not at the two soldiers that he frowned. Beyond them, at the gate of one of the more distant palm-embosked bungalows, a rickshaw stood in readiness, was at that moment being entered by a lady clad in white from open parasol to shoe-tip. For an instant his pace slackened like that of a man instinctively impelled to turn back on his tracks, then he re-affirmed its briskness.

He and the rickshaw now in movement drew near to one another and, although he gazed determinedly in another

direction, he had—he knew not how—a glimpse of her face above the bobbing head of the runner. Another moment, and she was abreast of him, the runner immobile at her prettily-authoritative order.

"Frank!"

There was no help for it. Common courtesy exacted that he should stop, bring his hand up to his helmet in salute, school his voice to a polite ordinariness, conjure up some sort of smile.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Fanshaw." His eyes rested unwillingly on her face, its fresh young beauty yet unwilted by this tropic furnace. He felt, awkwardly, that he ought to say something more. "Isn't it too early for you to be out?" He kicked himself for the instinctive assumption of authority in his tone. "Better an hour later, you know," he added, in attenuation.

"I'm going to tea with the Padre's wife," she said, smiling at him, "and it's shade all the way. But I didn't stop you to explain that I'm not as mad as I look. I've already done that to Dick this afternoon. Frank!" her voice went serious, "come here! I want to talk to you."

He took a step nearer the rickshaw. "Well?"

"I've been waiting for a chance of a word alone with you for three months—ever since we came out—and you seem to be the one person that I never meet except in a crowd."

"Yes?" he said, with a false innocence. He had seen to it, with a grim thoroughness, that they never should meet except in a crowd. "I've been pretty busy, you know."

Her eyes—such dear, honest eyes, they were!—caught his for a moment, looked into them.

"Frank!" she said. "I want—I've wanted all these three months—to—to ask you to forgive me. I treated you badly, very badly, I know." She hesitated, in the embarrassment of this avowal.

"That's all right," he muttered, looking away from her. "The best man won, I suppose."

She flushed a little, stopped herself—he could guess as his glance came back to her—from saying, on a naïve impulse, how much she and Dick were in love with one another.

He did not need her to tell him. He had observed it from his distance on the edge of the crowd, with eyes that could translate, self-torturingly acute, every touch and gesture that passed between her and her husband.

She broke the awkwardness of the pause. "We had no idea, Dick and I, when we married," she said, "that he would be sent to this station. He expected India."

"It's not your fault," he said, through his teeth. "It's just one of those little tricks that Fate plays upon people."

Her eyes went sympathetic.

"Perhaps Fate knows best," she said. "Frank—we've been pals ever since I was in short frocks—won't you be friends still?"

"Of course," he managed to say, uncomfortably. "Of course."

"You won't bear a grudge? You'll still be the best pal I ever had? Shake hands on it?" Their eyes met, looked into one another's, as she stretched out her hand to him. For one moment, as though he measured the gravity of what she asked of him, he looked into the candid beauty of her face, and then he reached up his hand to hers.

"I shake," he said, simply.

"And Dick?" she asked. "You'll be friends with him—real friends?"

He nodded. "If he wants me to."

"No. Whether he wants you to or not. For my sake. I can't be happy if I feel that my one bit of home out here is hostile to him. You promise?" She was exercising her old authority over him, the old authority of her charm that two years ago. . . . He succumbed.

"All right," he said. "I promise. For your sake."

The sudden radiance of her face was—almost—full compensation.

"Thank you, Frank. That's all I want. You never broke your word in your life. You've made me so happy."

"I'm glad," he said. "And now," he smiled, "you've kept the General waiting!"

"Explain to him that you've done your day's kind action, and he'll forgive you. He's the dearest old soul,

really. But I release you. You've promised—and you'll come and see us—not in a crowd ? "

" I've promised," he said.

He saluted, and the coolie sped off along the white road with her. For one moment he stood looking after her parasol above the back of the rickshaw, and then he resumed his way. He took a deep chestful of the baking air, with incomplete relief, found himself quivering oddly. That first meeting, *tête-à-tête*, which he had so long dreaded, was over.

He went along the road with his surroundings fading out of reality. He was back in the dusk of an English summer evening, he and she together within the clump of willows that drooped slim fingers to the trout-stream up which they had fished all day. He was trembling with the audacity of that utterance which all day he had been trying to phrase to himself with sufficient delicacy of approach, so freshly innocent of even suspecting it she seemed in her boy-like comradeship—that utterance which at last had burst from him, surprising him by its spontaniety, its almost brutal directness.

" By God, Nina—I'm sorry if I offend you—but I love you ! "

And she had looked at him, and said nothing—until after he had kissed her, caught tight in his arms. And then she had whispered.

Two years ago ! He had left her behind, pledged to be his wife, a miracle of newly-perceived, almost awesome, womanhood, intoxicating in her happy beauty, in her incredible reciprocation of his love, that he could scarcely identify with the little girl he had seen grow up in interval to interval of leave from foreign service. He had come back to Menangpore to count off the days, to live through the three years—or it might be only two, if she came out to him—which he must endure until their marriage, endure with every fibre of his body craving for her, with his whole mind soaked in the thought of her.

They wrote, of course, by every mail—until that mail, eight months ago, which had brought the letter which had stunned him, so that since he had never felt himself really

and fully alive. She had made a mistake—it had been that he had always been such a dear, good old pal—she had thought fondness—was—(she had knocked out that line without finishing it)—anyway, it was Major Fanshaw, home on leave from India, whom she was marrying, almost at once. He had seen an account of the ceremony in *The Times*, a little later. And then, for a supreme and savage irony, the humorously-minded gods who whisper in the ears of the clerks of the A.G.'s Department at the War Office had sent Major Richard Fanshaw to join the Headquarters Staff, Menangpore. The same gods, nudging one another, had vetoed Major Francis Bruce's immediate application for a transfer.

Quite apart from this humiliating supersession, he did not greatly like Dick Fanshaw. In fact, no one in the garrison greatly liked him. The newcomer had not the knack of sociability. He was a thin-faced, reserved sort of man, absorbed in his own thoughts, alleged to be studious, efficient at his job but quite useless on the polo-field. It was a mystery beyond Bruce's comprehension how he and Nina had ever become intimate enough for even a proposal of marriage. Yet there was the fact—he had seen it with his own eyes—they were desperately, absorbedly, in love with one another.

Bah! He put the thing out of his mind. He'd promised Nina to be friendly with Fanshaw, and he'd do his best to be decent to him. If Fanshaw ever wanted a pal, he'd be handy—for Nina's sake.

He had arrived at the veranda of the white-painted Garrison Headquarters, and turned, on the steps, for a glance at the view from this hill-top, to get another picture in his mind before attending to whatever business it was the General had for him.

Far below him, beyond the palms that framed the view, the deep blue sea stretched away to a heat-misted horizon. In the middle distance, a warship, tiny like a toy, was heading for the harbour. Close in, over the edge of the hill and abruptly diminished by the vertical distance, the stone arms of the new dockyard, untidy with cranes and scaffolding, were white upon the blue water. Native

workmen swarmed over it like busy ants. He wondered who many spies were still among that horde. He had pulled out half-a-dozen of them already, for unadvertised and summary court-martial—gallant little officers, for all their coolie-rags, who had smiled inscrutably at the firing-party. One could not help admiring them.

Restored to a professional frame of mind, he turned and plunged into the comparative darkness of the building, went along the corridor to the door inscribed "G.O.C." tapped and entered. The General, pipe in mouth, was seated at his big desk, signing busily the papers which Rolfe, erect by his side, was presenting to him. Rolfe looked up at his appearance, nodded amicably, a discreet smile on his big pleasant face—good chap, Rolfe, the antithesis of Fanshaw, with a cheery word for everybody, a man who worked hard and played hard, even went the pace a little, despite his weight the most brilliant polo-forward in the Garrison—but the General, attending to one thing at a time as was his wont, continued to dash off one signature after another without a glance at him. Only when he had finished the last of the papers which Rolfe now gathered into a sheaf and handed over to a waiting orderly, did he lift his head, acknowledge Bruce's prompt salute.

"Don't go, Rolfe," he said, as that officer went towards the door with the orderly. "I want you both. Sit down, Bruce."

The orderly closed the door behind him and there was a moment or two of silence as the General leaned back in his chair and refilled his pipe. Bruce contemplated the strong-jawed face with the iron-grey moustache whose eyes narrowed themselves in a pause of meditation where he brought his thoughts to a focus while, deliberately, without hurry, he struck a match and surrounded himself with the smoke-cloud of the first few preliminary puffs. It was a familiar enough face to him. In his three years of staff-captain to General Sanderson's brigade in the old days in France, Bruce had learned to like as well as respect that grimly efficient personality which, though human enough off duty, would, when the occasion demanded, send men to certain death without a qualm yet never without a

precisely-achieved purpose that justified the sacrifice. Cunning as a fox he could be, too, as Fritz had more than once learned to his cost. The pause was at an end. The General's steel-grey eyes glanced comprehensively at his subordinates.

"Just see there's no one hanging round that door, Rolfe," he said, "and then sit down." His voice was serious.

Rolfe obeyed, went to the door, returned to take a chair at the side of the General's desk opposite to Bruce. They waited for his next words. They came with a quiet deliberation, between puffs at his pipe. "Can either of you imagine how any unauthorised person could have got at Plan C?"

The two men jumped in their chairs.

"Good Lord, sir!—you don't mean to say——?" began Rolfe.

Bruce said nothing. He just gasped in the shock. Plan C—he had seen it, of course; the General had explained it to Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe and him before locking it away—Plan C contained the diagrams of the submarine-mine barrages which would protect this most important base in war-time, together with the combination of cross-fire from the batteries now being erected. If the potential enemy had got hold of those plans——! Good God!—— And only Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe and himself had been admitted to the secret of their existence. Hathaway was dead, carried off in half-a-dozen hours by fever. But where was Fanshaw? Surely Fanshaw ought to be here also——

These thoughts which went through him in a flash, were interrupted by the General's grim, quiet voice.

"That's precisely what I do mean to say. Someone has got at Plan C—and, of course, copied it."

"But—are you sure, sir?" said Rolfe, excited and incredulous.

For answer the General got up from his chair, went to the safe behind him, unlocked a heavy steel door with a key chained to his pocket, unlocked yet another door behind that, extracted from an inner drawer, locked by yet another key, a bulky envelope heavily sealed with red wax, brought it forward to them.

"This is a new envelope I sealed the other day," said the

General. "Inside is the original." He tore it open, revealed another sealed envelope, ripped along one edge. "I cut it open myself when I found something was wrong. Now, gentlemen, our ingenious spy overlooked one little thing in his haste. Those seals are apparently quite all right. But when I put away that envelope, it had a fine hair tied round it, passing through the centre of the sealing-wax. Is there any hair in that seal? There is not. Furthermore, the inner envelope was likewise tied round with a hair, and "—he extracted it—" you can see for yourselves that that hair has likewise disappeared. And for a final proof——" he pulled out several sheets of thin, blue paper, marked with curved masses of little black crosses and long straight lines that radiated out from various points along a charted-out coastline, held it up to the light. "Do you see?" Close up to the edge in each corner was a minute pin-hole where the sheet had been fastened out flat, presumably to be photographed. "Each sheet has those same little pin-holes. I think that is sufficient evidence." He put back the plans in their envelopes, locked them again in the safe, turned to Bruce.

"Well, what have you to say to that?" he asked, with a grim smile.

"It knocks me over, sir," replied Bruce, "and it makes me feel somehow it's my fault. It's up to me to prevent that kind of thing."

"Precisely," agreed the General. "That's why I sent for you. You can't suggest any possible person?"

"No, sir. No one has any key to that safe but you."

The General nodded.

"Quite. But someone has got at my keys, somehow—a whiff of a drug while I was asleep might have done it—these native thieves can get in anywhere—and taken an impression of them. There was that fellow you shot trying to break into your bedroom three or four nights ago, Rolfe, you remember?"

"The brute!" said Rolfe. "I just caught him slipping in through the window like a shadow."

"That's the kind of thing," said the General. "But observe! Only Plan C has been interfered with, and an

ordinary native thief would certainly have helped himself to the considerable amount of cash which was much more in evidence than the plans in the inner drawer. It is wildly improbable that any native could have distinguished one document from another, impossible that he should have picked on Plan C, copied it, and sealed it up again with the office seal. Whoever it was that got hold of my keys, he was only a subordinate agent, *employed by someone who knew that Plan C was in that safe.* And, apart from myself," the General's probing eyes rested on both of them successively, "only four men were aware of that fact."

"It couldn't have been Hathaway," murmured Rolfe, screwing up his broad, honest face in cogitation of this problem.

"It could not," said the General. "Hathaway died six weeks ago. One of my little habits is to examine those envelopes every day. That envelope was interfered with just three weeks back."

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Bruce, in surprise.

"Three weeks," repeated the General. "I've been poaching on your preserves, Bruce—trying to do a little intelligence work in the meantime."

He had now seated himself again and relit his pipe, looking at them over the flame of the match. Bruce and Rolfe glanced at each other in uncomfortable embarrassment.

"Don't you think, sir," said Bruce, "that Fanshaw ought to be here too?"

"I did not invite Fanshaw," replied the General, ". . . *purposely.*"

"Good God!" The exclamation broke from Bruce in spontaneous horror. "Surely, sir, you don't think——?"

"Why—it might just as likely be either of us!" said Rolfe.

The General carefully put down his match in the ash-tray.

"It might," he said, "and I confess that I gave some thought to that possibility. I went so far as to subsidise a burglar myself—for all three of you—a burglar that you didn't shoot, Rolfe." He smiled at him. "I was curious to know whether any of you had been doing any photography lately—and I took steps to find out within twenty-four

hours of that envelope being tampered with. Your camera, Rolfe, I find, has a broken shutter and a thick later of dust inside—you have evidently given up the hobby. Yours, Bruce, happened to be charged with a half-used spool. I developed those films and find they represent the Gymkhana which took place a couple of weeks before."

"That's where that spool went, then!" exclaimed Bruce, suddenly illuminated.

The General went on quietly. "Fanshaw's camera, on the other hand, a very excellent half-plate Zeiss, had no films in it. But it happened to have its focus-adjustment left at three feet and closed up in the folds of the bellows was a certain amount of grey dust which, having once done a little photography myself, I recognised as magnesium ash."

"Good Lord!" said Bruce.

"I kept the camera and the ash as circumstantial evidence, if necessary," continued the General, "and, funnily enough, Fanshaw thought fit to complain to me next day that someone had pinched his apparatus. Only he put the date of its disappearance as the day prior to that on which Plan C was tampered with. Since, however, my very excellent burglar found the camera in his room forty hours after Fanshaw alleged that he had missed it, I'm afraid the alibi won't wash."

"But surely, sir," objected Rolfe, "all this—even if it does look fishy—is very flimsy evidence!"

"Very," agreed the General, imperturbably. "But it happens to be reinforced. How much do you think Plan C is worth to—we won't specify the country?"

"They'd pay anything for it," said Bruce. "Twenty thousand pounds or more."

"Precisely. Or more. Now Fanshaw was a poor man—I happen to know that he got into debt in India. I cannot discover that he has since come into any inheritance. Would his wife have had any money, Bruce?"

"Sir!"

"This is no time for fine feelings!" The old man crushed him with his sudden, formidable severity. "I know perfectly well that you were engaged to the lady. Did she have any money?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I've been doing a good deal of private cipher-work over the cables these last three weeks—and three days ago the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds was paid in London by banker's draft from the Asiatic Bank to the London and North-Western Bank for the credit of a new account opened in favour of a certain John Smith by telegraphic instruction from Menangpore."

"*Phew*!" ejaculated Rolfe, mopping his brow. "Looks ugly!"

"But, sir," said Bruce, "how do you know that this John Smith is—no, I can't say I like him, but I can't imagine Fanshaw doing it!"

For answer, the General unlocked the drawer at which he sat, produced a telegraph-form.

"This is the original, handed in at the cable-company's office four days back," he said. "'*London North-Western Bank, London, please open account with draft Asiatic Bank thirty-five thousand letter follows John Smith Menangpore.*' This was handed in by a native who has not yet been traced. But note!—the message is typewritten and gummed on to the telegraph-form—and it is written on a Yöst machine. There is only one Yöst machine in this Garrison, and that happens to be in Fanshaw's office—the one he reserves for his own use. It is true, there are probably other Yösts in Menangpore, but no two machines, even of the same make, write precisely alike. I have personally copied this message again on Fanshaw's machine—here it is," he laid a typewritten slip of paper side by side with the cablegram before them; one looked like a carbon copy of the other. "You see—they are identical, the same weak *n* and *p*, the same worn *c*, the same *f* out of alignment."

"There is no doubt about it," said Bruce, handing them back after careful scrutiny, "but, sir—this is awful!"

"And the letter that follows," enquired Rolfe, "have you got that, sir?"

"That was stopped in the post last night," replied the General, taking another sheet of paper from his drawer. "Here it is. It doesn't tell us much. It merely confirms the cablegram, gives the specimen of the signature 'John

Smith,' and orders the money to be held on deposit pending further instructions. It is typed on the same machine, and addressed from the European Club."

"That doesn't mean much," said Bruce. "Everyone goes there. I was there myself yesterday."

"So was I," said Rolfe.

"So was Fanshaw," added the General. He leaned back in his chair, contemplated them grimly. "Well?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," said Bruce. "It is too terrible!"

Rolfe mopped his broad, honest face in evident distress.

"I suppose it means a court-martial, sir?" he said.

The General smiled with the faintest twist of his lips.

"My dear Rolfe," he said, "you are sometimes an amazingly simple person. There is no doubt at all that our friend the possible enemy is already in possession of Plan C. Whatever happens, he mustn't be allowed to guess that *we know he knows it.* Plan C is actually already *ipso facto* obsolete. He must think it is still our real war-plan and we in blissful ignorance of his stolen knowledge. A court-martial would give him the hint—you can't keep secrecy over things like that. No. A court-martial is out of the question."

"Then—nothing is to be done, sir?" queried Rolfe.

"Oh yes," said the General, quietly. "We're certainly going to do something. We can't let people play games of this sort with impunity."

"What do you propose, then, sir?" asked Bruce.

The General kept them in suspense for a moment while he relit his pipe. Then he leaned forward, the match alight between his fingers.

"You and Rolfe are going to pay a little friendly call on Fanshaw this afternoon," he said significantly. He held up the match before them, caught their eyes, blew out the flame. "Traitors sometimes commit suicide in a fit of remorse—*and leave a signed confession,*" he added, in grim elucidation.

Bruce jumped to his feet, found himself trembling violently.

"Sir—I can't do it!"

The General turned on him that gaze which he knew how to make suddenly terrible.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sternly.

Bruce felt himself like an audacious schoolboy under those insupportable eyes. But he nerved himself to confront them.

"Sir—I beg of you—choose someone else! It puts me in an impossible—a terrible position!"

The General's voice came at him like a clap of thunder.

"Major Bruce! Since when have you learned to disobey my orders?"

It was the same voice, the same inexorably hard face, aflame with eyes whose sudden blaze of authority annihilated opposition, with which—Bruce found it recalled to him by an odd trick of memory—at Devil's Wood he had ordered forward the remnant of his brigade to certain death over corpses already three deep. When General Sanderson commanded, men obeyed—without question. Bruce had obeyed then, forgetting the shrinking of his flesh in the storm of shells. He surrendered now, wretchedly, long habit of discipline asserting itself.

Wordlessly, eyes fixed on his, the General accepted his submission. He turned to Rolfe.

"Have you any objection to make, Major Rolfe?" he asked, harshly.

Rolfe stood twisting his handkerchief in his hands, his broad, honest face deathly white, perspiration pearling on his brow.

"No—no, sir," he stammered.

The General's face cleared to an expression that was more kindly. He turned to Bruce.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you, Bruce, but it can't be helped. In the first place, it's your job as Intelligence Officer. In the second, only you, Rolfe and Fanshaw know anything of this business. We can't admit any more to it. Also, you understand, this is *unofficial*—an affair of honour, between officers and gentlemen. I send Major Fanshaw two of his own rank. I shall expect your report in half-an-hour. And, remember, *a written and signed confession*!"

Bruce heard him as though he were in a dream. His mind held only one clearly definite thought : Nina ! *Nina !* It hammered in him with every beat of the blood through his suddenly-fevered brain. What would Nina think—Nina whom he had just promised—Nina whose happiness he was going brutally to annihilate ? Nina ! It made him feel sick. He could almost have wished that it was he himself guilty of this unspeakably loathly crime, rather than that it should be Nina's husband. Nina's husband ! Nina's husband ! God !—Nina's husband, whom she adored !

It was automatically, as in a dream, that he saluted the General and, with Rolfe, went out of the office ; in an unreal dream that he found himself walking across the parade-ground, in the blinding glare of the sun, towards Fanshaw's bungalow. Nina !—Nina's husband ! He would rather have walked to execution than to the mission on which he was bound.

" Ruddy business, isn't it ? " said Rolfe, thickly.

Bruce glanced at his comrade. The broad, normally cheery face was deathly white, beaded with damp. Good old Rolfe ! He hated it, too. He was suddenly grateful for this companionship. Rolfe's thorough and well-known decency somehow sanctioned their errand. In his straightforward sense of duty, he had not jibbed at the General's order. It was true that Nina—Nina meant nothing to him, of course.

He failed to get a word out of his throat in answer, and they walked on in silence.

They were within a dozen yards of Fanshaw's bungalow when Rolfe turned to him.

" Oughtn't we to get our revolvers first ? " he suggested.

" No." He could not trust his voice to more than curtness. " Unnecessary."

On the step of the veranda Rolfe clutched his arm, spoke again.

" You—you do the talking," he said. " It's your job. I'll back you up."

He nodded in mute acquiescence, summed all his will to steady the thumping of his heart, to find a voice to talk with.

They entered.

Bruce pushed aside a mat-curtain, saw Fanshaw busy writing at his table. He glanced up at them with his lantern-jawed, tight-lipped, worried-looking face as they came within the threshold.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said, rather ungraciously. "Paying visits? My wife's out—but you'll find the syphon over there." He jerked his pen towards the side-board, while his eyes went down again to the letter he was writing. "Help yourselves."

To Bruce's surprise, he found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw——"

Fanshaw looked up again irritably from the half-written word.

"Yes?" And then he saw the ghastliness of their faces. "Why—what's wrong?" His tone changed sharply to startled concern. "What in the world's the matter? You look perfectly awful, both of you."

Again, Bruce found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw," he said. "We've come to talk to you—Rolfe and I. D'you mind if we sit down?" He felt that he must sit or fall.

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You'll find chairs there," he said, shortly. "What is it?"

They seated themselves, confronting him over his writing-table. Bruce glanced up to the wall behind Fanshaw where a revolver-holster was hanging from a peg.

"D'you mind——" he asked, awkwardly, "d'you mind letting me have your revolver, Fanshaw?"

Fanshaw stared at them, puzzled, and then rose, took the revolver-holster from the wall, threw it upon the table rather peevishly. Bruce picked it up.

"Now then, what's the trouble?" queried Fanshaw as he sat down again. "What do you want my revolver for? I can see by your faces that something is wrong."

Bruce dandled the heavy holster.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we—Rolfe and I—have come on a pretty rotten job. Plan C has been got at and copied."

Fanshaw frowned at him in incredulity. "*Plan C?*" he echoed. "Good God!"

"Pretty loathsome, isn't it?" said Bruce between his teeth. He was beginning to hate that thin-faced traitor in front of him—a quite unsuspected fount of deep-drawn instinctive hatred surged up in him—he would dare to try and bluff them, would he? If only he weren't Nina's husband! "Pretty loathsome, Fanshaw," he repeated with grim directness.

Fanshaw put up an amazingly good show of bewilderment—almost impressive, had it not been for the General's coldly logical, step-by-step demonstration.

"Good God! But the General slept with the keys fastened round his neck—he told me so himself!"

Bruce looked him in the eyes, tried to look into the soul of him.

"We don't want to go into that," he said. "We know all about it. The General has sent us, Rolfe and me, to settle the matter without a public scandal."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Fanshaw looked from one to the other of them, his face a study in lack of comprehension.

"You know—*perfectly well!*" said Bruce. "The game's up, Fanshaw. There's no use bluffing. You're caught out. We've got the evidence."

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You've—got—the—evidence?" he said slowly, in a tone that seemed to try to make it real to himself. "What evidence?"

"More than enough for a court-martial to shoot you half-a-dozen times over," replied Bruce, succintly. "Fanshaw, this is a rotten business. It makes me sick to have to do it. But for the honour of the Army—for the sake of your own family—we don't want a scandal. We give you an easy way out. We want a written and signed confession—I give you my word that no one shall see it but the General—no one shall know anything about it—and then——" he drew the revolver from the holster, laid it upon the table, pushed it towards Fanshaw, "we'll leave you with this. You can pretend to have been cleaning it."

Fanshaw stared at the revolver, shrank back from it,

looked up again at the two of them, a sudden horror in his eyes.

"You mean——?" he began.

Bruce pushed the weapon a little nearer to him.

"Precisely what I say, Fanshaw," he said, his words distinct despite the dryness of his mouth. "And no one —not even Nina—shall ever guess." He had used her Christian name unconsciously. "The episode will be buried—with you."

Fanshaw knocked away the revolver, jumped to his feet.

"You must be mad—both of you!" he cried. "Utterly mad!—I'm going to see the General at once!" He took a step towards the door.

Bruce placed himself in front of him.

"I'm sorry, Fanshaw. But it can't be allowed. The General sent us to you. He gave us half-an-hour in which to bring back your written confession." He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Ten minutes of it have gone. You've made a bad break, Fanshaw—but own up, and play out the only decent game open to you. You ought to be grateful for the chance." With a strong arm he thrust him back towards the table.

Fanshaw stood looking at them, trembling suddenly, his face as white as theirs.

"Either you are both mad!" he cried, "or this is an infernal conspiracy to murder me!" He looked into Bruce's eyes with an insulting suspicion. "I can imagine that *one* of you has a motive," he said deliberately. "Though I should not have thought it of you."

Bruce winced as though he had been slashed across the face.

"Leave that out, Fanshaw," he said. "For just that reason I'd rather be dead than here. I'm obeying orders —don't make it harder for me. Will you write out that confession?"

"Of course not! I know nothing about it. If anyone has any charges to bring against me, let them be brought forward in a proper manner—and I'll deal with them." He wrapped himself in his dignity as an officer, spoke with curt contempt.

Rolfe intervened for the first time in this colloquy. "Fanshaw," he said, thickly. "You know that means a court-martial—and I wouldn't give tuppence for your chance."

Fanshaw swung round on him.

"Look here, I've had enough of this! Clear out—both of you! And I'll trouble you, both of you, to meet me in front of the General!"

Rolfe shrugged his big shoulders, looked at Bruce. "Well," he said, "I suppose if Fanshaw *insists* on a court-martial, we're helpless. We can't compel him to write a confession. The only thing is to report it. We've done our best—and, for my part, Fanshaw, I'm glad of an excuse to be out of a very unpleasant business. Come along, Bruce!"

He took a step towards the door, was checked by Bruce's restraining arm.

"No," said Bruce, his teeth clenched. "We're going to stay here until we've done our job—and there's not going to be any public scandal in this business. Fanshaw!" he looked him in the eyes "—for the sake of all that was ever sacred to you in the world—for the sake of your old school—the Army—*for your wife's sake!*—play the man and own up decently. You haven't the ghost of a chance before a court-martial, and, though they might not shoot you, the disgrace would be worse than death—for you—and"—his voice choked—"for Nina."

Fanshaw's look at him was an insult.

"Major Bruce," he said, "I shall be obliged if you will refer to my wife as Mrs. Fanshaw."

The three men jumped at a bright, girlish voice from the other side of the mat-curtain. "Dick darling!—I'm back!—I've escaped!" There was a happy little laugh as the mat-curtain was pulled back and Nina stood on the threshold. Her fresh young face lit up in pleasant surprise as she saw Bruce. "Why, Frank!—how nice of you to come so soon!" she exclaimed, coming towards him and stretching out her hand.

Bruce had one glance at her, and something seemed to smite him sharply, viciously, inside him. He turned away

his head, omitted to notice her proffered hand. He got his voice somehow.

"Fanshaw," he said. "Will you please ask your wife to leave us? This—this is an official matter."

She came nearer, perceived Rolfe, who had turned to stare at a print upon the wall, and now nodded awkwardly to her. Her eyes went round the three men.

"Why—what is wrong?" she cried. "What has happened?—You look ghastly, all of you!"

There was a silence.

"Frank! What is the matter? What have you and Major Rolfe come about?" He did not reply, avoided her eyes. "Dick!" She clutched his arm. "Tell me!"

Fanshaw shrugged his shoulders, smiled unpleasantly at Bruce.

"My dear," he replied, "apparently some important secret plans have been stolen, and it seems that in some way or other it has been made to look as though I had done it. Consequently, Major Bruce and Major Rolfe have come here with the amiable proposal that I shall write out a confession and then commit suicide." Bruce set his teeth, stifling a groan. *The cad!* Not to keep it from Nina! Fanshaw went on. "Alternatively, I shall be condemned by a court-martial."

She swung round upon Bruce in a flame of indignation.

"*Oh!*" she cried. "And *you* can believe this? *You* could come here to—to——" she made a gesture of horror. "*You* of all people——!"

He met her eyes—and wished that he were dead.

"I couldn't help myself," he managed to say. "I tried—not to have to do it. It was an order—from the General—to both of us."

"*But you believed it!* You believed this of Dick!—You—you who had promised me to be his friend—you did not tell the General that it was utterly impossible—you did not stand up for him—you—*you believed it!*" Her contemptuous indignation scorched him.

"I'd have given all I know not to—not to have had to believe it," he said, desperately, "—but—but——"

"But what?"

" If I must—the evidence is too convincing ! " He cursed himself for saying so much, even as the words were uttered.

" And what is this evidence ? "

Bruce turned from her to Fanshaw.

" For God's sake, Fanshaw—I can't stand any more of this—either ask your wife to withdraw—or," he gestured abandonment to disaster " —we must let matters take their official course."

Fanshaw was the least perturbed person in the room.

" I should like to hear your precious evidence myself," he said, with an unpleasant curtness of tone. " Tell her ! "

Bruce looked again at the woman whose happiness was the one thing in the world that mattered to him.

" I insist ! " she said. " And I have a right to insist ! "

He surrendered to the look of proud authority in her pale face. " I'd infinitely rather not," he said, " but since so much has been said already "—he flashed a glance of scorn at Fanshaw— His face haggard with the long-continued strain, but with a succint clarity, he told her of the tampering with the secret plan, known to Fanshaw, Rolfe and himself alone ; of the finding of Fanshaw's camera, with the focus set to three feet and flashlight ash and still upon the bellows, within twenty-four hours after the plan had been copied and forty hours after Fanshaw had said he had lost it.

" But someone might have stolen Dick's camera, used it and put it back ! " she exclaimed.

" They might," he agreed, " but that's not all." He went on to tell her of the bankers' draft for thirty-five thousand pounds paid by the Asiatic Bank to the credit of a new account opened in an assumed name by cable from Menangpore and confirmed by letter. " And," he concluded, through his set teeth, " both cablegram and letter were typed on your husband's Yöst machine which he uses personally."

" Good God ! " ejaculated Fanshaw, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

She had listened intently. " And is that all your evidence ? " she asked.

" It's damnably convincing, Mrs. Fanshaw—though I hate to say it. The man who got at that plan must have

been either your husband, Rolfe, or myself. You can't imagine us coming on a job like this if either of us did it. And all the evidence piles up against—" he broke off abruptly, with a gesture towards Fanshaw. "The whole thing's too ghastly," he finished.

Fanshaw was about to say something when his wife checked him. Her brow was wrinkled with a sudden thought.

"Wait a moment," she said. "What was the name of the bank in London and what name was on the cablegram?"

"The cable was sent by someone signing himself John Smith to the London and North-Western Bank."

"*John Smith?*" She gave a little cry of triumph. "And who handed in that cablegram?"

"A native who has not yet been traced."

"Then perhaps I can throw some light on it. Four days ago, after dark, when I was sitting on the veranda, a native came wandering up the road and asked me, in broken English, if I had seen a certain officer. I could not understand him very well at first, and as he had a piece of paper in his hand I made him show it to me, thinking that it would give the name. That piece of paper was the receipt from the cable-company for a cablegram sent to the London and North-Western Bank by John Smith. I didn't know the name, and I asked him if he was sure it was 'Smith' he wanted. He said: 'No—no—Major Sahib Roff—*Major Sahib Roff!*' And I sent him along to Major Rolfe's bungalow!"

"That's a lie!" Rolfe burst out, furiously. "A stupid lie!"

"Steady, Rolfe!" said Bruce. "You forget you are speaking to a lady."

"She'd tell any yarn, of course, to save her husband—and it is a lie!" Rolfe reiterated.

"That same evening," she went on, coldly ignoring the interruption, "we heard that Major Rolfe had shot a native who was trying to burgle his house."

"That's true enough," exclaimed Rolfe, "I just caught the brute as he was clambering through the window. But the other is sheer imagination. Look here, Bruce, I'm not going to stay here while Mrs. Fanshaw invents red herrings to draw across the trail. She can tell that story

to the court-martial. I'm going back to the General to report that Fanshaw refuses to sign a confession. Come along!" He took a step towards the door.

"No!" cried Mrs. Fanshaw. She stepped in front of him with a quick movement, blocking the doorway. "You will please wait a little, Major Rolfe!" she said, and then turned to Bruce. "Frank! Supposing—I only ask you to suppose—that Major Rolfe was the one of you three who sent that cablegram, and that he still has the receipt in his pocket—is it safe to let him go out of here, and perhaps destroy it? It might be the one piece of evidence that could save Dick."

"Nonsense!" said Rolfe angrily. "It is a monstrous suggestion! Please let me pass, Mrs. Fanshaw!"

She ignored him, looked at Bruce.

"Frank! I want you to search Major Rolfe before he leaves this room."

Fanshaw interposed.

"My dear, whatever you think—one can't do things like that. You can't expect Bruce to insult a brother-officer on your mere supposition. But——" he glanced sharply at Rolfe, "in view of what you have said, we will all accompany him to the General."

She turned to her husband.

"Dick," she said, "you are under suspicion, and anything you say or do may harm you. Leave this to me." She looked again at Bruce. "Frank! Please do as I say!"

Bruce hesitated, glanced at Rolfe who was red with indignation, his hands working irritably, as he stood unable to pass Mrs. Fanshaw without sheer violence to her. It was impossible—fantastic! No man could have come on such an errand if he were himself guilty. He despised himself for even momentarily admitting the suspicion.

"But, Mrs. Fanshaw, what you ask of me is outrageous. Rolfe and I have been friends for years. It is unthinkable that he should have done it. You must have been mistaken about that native."

"I am not mistaken," she replied, doggedly. "Frank! things have been made to look black for Dick. He needs a

pal—badly. To-day you gave me your word. Are you going to break it ? " Her eyes challenged all he had ever felt for her.

He took a long breath, looked at Rolfe—cheery, thoroughly decent Rolfe, who now stood outraged by this diabolical supposition. All the long years of their intimacy rose up in protest. Insult him for that man he had no doubt was guilty, that man he had to keep himself from hating—Nina's husband ? Nina's husband ! Yes—*just because of that !* There was just one faint, improbable chance. He had to have it. He turned to Fanshaw.

" Fanshaw, before I insult Rolfe, I ask you—before God—whether you sold that plan ? "

" Before God," replied Fanshaw, with sober emphasis, " I did not."

Bruce twisted himself round to Rolfe.

" Rolfe," he said, " I hate to even seem to suspect you of such a horrible thing, but I must ask you to let me go through your pockets."

" Certainly not ! " said Rolfe, indignantly. " I have just as much right to search you ! Mrs. Fanshaw can make her absurd accusation before the court-martial—and the court will decide whether Major Fanshaw is guilty or not. But I'm certainly not going to submit to the indignity of letting you go through my private papers without any authorisation whatever ! " His broad face was livid with anger.

Bruce placed himself in front of Mrs. Fanshaw, blocking the doorway. For the first time, a real suspicion shot up in him.

" Rolfe," he said, steadily, " I am certainly going to search you—even if I knock you down for it."

" You'd better try ! " replied Rolfe, in furious scorn. " I'm going straight to the General—and I advise you to stand away from that door ! "

Bruce smiled. The next moment Rolfe had rushed at him, and, rushing, met a straight left from the shoulder. He went with a crash to the floor.

Before he could stir, Bruce was on top of him, one hand on his throat, the other going through the pockets of his tunic. He extracted a letter-wallet, held it out to Mrs.

Fanshaw. She took it, went to the window, examined it, uttered a sharp little cry.

"Here it is!"

Bruce got to his feet, reached for the revolver on the table, held Rolfe covered.

"What is it?" he asked. "Here, Fanshaw, take the gun and see he doesn't rush."

He went to the window, took the two pieces of paper Mrs. Fanshaw handed to him. One was the receipt from the cable company; the other was covered with evidently practice-signatures of 'John Smith.' He turned to Rolfe who had also scrambled to his feet and stood sullenly scared and silent under the menace of Fanshaw's weapon.

"Have you got anything to say?"

An ugly word was the only answer.

Bruce addressed himself to Mrs. Fanshaw.

"Mrs. Fanshaw," he said, with a quietly grim politeness, "will you now please leave us. You have played your part. Dick and I will do the rest."

She went straight out of the room. The three men, left alone, stood looking at one another in a pause of silence. It was Bruce who broke it.

"Rolfe," he said, curtly. "I once had the honour of serving under your father. He was a gallant gentleman. For his sake, I give you the chance the General sent us to give Fanshaw." He pointed to the table. "Sit down—and write! And afterwards Fanshaw and I will see you as far as your bungalow."

Rolfe stood staring at him, a little foam upon the lips of his broad, white face. For a moment he looked into Bruce's eyes, measured the inexorability of that decision, and then, slowly, unsteadily, he walked towards the writing-table.

. . . . . .

The General was still at his desk, leaning back in his chair, blowing meditative smoke-rings towards the ceiling, when Bruce entered, saluted.

"And Rolfe?" he asked, as his eyes came down to Bruce's solitary figure.

Bruce stepped forward, handed him a written sheet of note-paper, pointed shakily to the signature at the bottom.

"Here, sir," he said, in a voice that lacked steadiness for all his effort at self-command.

The General contemplated it, shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, bit upon the stem.

"H'm!" he said. "And afterwards?" He looked up at him.

Bruce blew out an imaginary match.

The General nodded. Methodically, he folded up the paper, put it in an envelope, sealed it, and locked it in his drawer. Then he smiled grimly.

"A bad hat," he said. "I was pretty sure he was the man, but everything pointed to Fanshaw. Rolfe's frontal defence was as good as impregnable. And we learnt in France, I think, not to make frontal attacks on impregnable defences. There's nearly always a way round."

Bruce stared at him. "Then you guessed, sir?"

The General shrugged his shoulders. "It was one of the two. I knew Fanshaw wouldn't sign if he were innocent, and I sent you to see fair play. The art of war, my dear Bruce, is the art of producing sudden crises and taking measures to profit by them. You can never foresee exactly how you'll do it, but you nearly always get what you want —if you put the right man on the job. In the very special circumstances," he smiled significantly, "I knew you were the right man."

THE RED SHAWL

THE RED SHAWL

In the Calle de las Sierpes, that narrow, vehicle-less street, shaded from a cloudless sky with awnings stretched from roof to roof of the tall houses, which is the centre of the life of Seville, its Fifth Avenue for shopping, its Boulevard for the promenade, the throng moved with the leisure of unhurried Spain. The straight, wide-brimmed, hard-crowned Andalusian hats of the men ; the comb-supported mantillas brightened with a flower in the hair, the black shawls trailing their fringes almost to the ground, of the women, lent them a note of picturesqueness of which they themselves were unconscious. Under *sombrero* and mantilla alike flashed quick, dark eyes, swift to smile or glow yet more darkly with sudden passion.

Leisurely as the promenaders moved from end to end of the thoroughfare, they lingered obstructively, causing an eddy in the human stream, opposite one of the several clubs, their exclusiveness differentiated from the cafés only by a brass rail across their open fronts, which democratically rank themselves with the shop-windows of the street. Those that passed looked back over their shoulders and turned again quickly to their companions in excited communication of a recognition. Those that lingered stared frankly at a young man seated at a table in the windowless front of the club, sipping his *manzanilla* in company with two older individuals.

Behind the trio, in the semi-obscurity of the café-like club-room, the wall was hung with a highly-coloured poster of a bull charging the cape-play of a toreador. It announced a *grand corrida extraordinaria* for the approaching feast-day, and featured in heavy type the names of the *espadas*—

Manuelito, Gregorio, Gonzalez. The young man at whom the crowd stared and nudged each other was the celebrated Manuelito, the great public's affectionate diminutive of Manuel Pérez. His companions were his business manager, Juan Hernandez, and a wealthy *aficionado* (in American, 'fan') of that sport which holds all Spain in a thrilled obsession.

The young man, handsome as are most of the younger heroes of the bull-ring, obviously the athlete even in these everyday clothes, sat apparently indifferent to this admiration. The murmured exclamations of "*Qué tio!*" ("What a lad!"), in an awe where mingled the pride of local possession, came to his ears without evoking the ghost of a recognitory smile under that straight-brimmed Andalusian hat. Fresh as he was in a much-heralded return from the enthusiastic multitudes of South American cities, he was inured to adulation, although perhaps not quite so contemptuous of it as he appeared. Ignoring his male admirers, he met the quick glances of the mantilla-draped women with the coolly-appraising stare of a man who can select where he will, but he let them pass without the flicker of an eyelid to hint a preference.

Suddenly, his eye was caught by a splash of vivid colour amid the sombre blacks of the thronging femininity of the street. Accompanied by an elderly *duena*, a young woman approached, taller and slimmer than most of those around her, differentiated from the crowd by a shawl of plain and brilliant red, its long silk fringes dabbing against the high heels of her dainty shoes. In her black hair, under the mantilla draped from the immense comb, a red carnation made a complementary spot of colour. Personality emanated from her even at a distance. All along the narrow street, people turned to look at her. She came close, and nearness revealed a young face, beautiful with a fascinating touch of piquancy, lit by large, long-lashed eyes pregnant with potential passion, vivified by the curve of a mouth as red as the carnation in her hair. She walked with a gait that suggested a lithe sinuosity of figure under the enveloping shawl.

As she passed, her glance rested upon the matador. He

stared at her in a sudden quickening of interest. She met his gaze coolly, unabashed. For a brief second her eyes looked into his with a deliberate and insolent bravado. She passed on, her dainty chin tilting into the air in provocative disdain.

The matador turned to his companions. "Who is that?" he asked.

"*Gusta usted?*" smiled the *aficionado*. "You are not the only one! That is Lolita."

"'La Sevillana'!"

"'La Sevillana', precisely," concurred the *aficionado*.

Lolita 'la Savillana' was the dancer who had just sprang into fame from one end of Spain to the other. Manuelito, gathering triumphs away in South America, had read of her in the newspapers. He had never seen her. Here in Seville, her name vied with his upon the hoardings that advertised their respective greatness.

"I must know her!" he exclaimed, his handsome face suddenly eager.

"Be careful!" laughed the *aficionado*. "You will make a double rival. Gregorio is not the man to let go his possessions easily."

"Gregorio?"

"Gregorio." The *aficionado* nodded. "He is mad on her—and she on him, they say."

Manuelito's face hardened. Gregorio was his great rival in the bull-ring, an *espada* who divided with him the delirious enthusiasm of the congregated thousands of spectators. The bull-fight 'fans' came to fisticuffs in their violent arguments as to who was the greater master. But Manuelito and Gregorio were friendly rivals. They had been boys together. They had won fame together, each receiving so much that no jealousy of the other disturbed their ancient friendship. There was room for both, and each recognised with a genuine affection that the other deserved the celebrity which came to him. They were billed together for the great bull-fight in two days' time and their *cuadrillas* would, of course, work in concert.

Manuelito's business-manager glanced anxiously at him.

" No follies, Manuelito ! " he said. " The *corrida* is for Thursday."

Manuelito ignored him.

" Where is Gregorio ? " he asked.

" He returns from Madrid to-morrow," answered Hernandez. " But no madness, Manuelito ! You must keep a cool head. All Spain will be watching you on Thursday —you have your American reputation to maintain."

The matador looked quickly away from him. The red shawl was returning. She approached, on his side of the street, would pass so close that unless she swerved she would brush him with its dangling filaments. He watched, fascinated, the jaunty, hip-swaying swagger of her walk. haughtily indifferent to the curiosity awakened on her passage, side by side with the *dueña* that convention demanded. Her face was impassible. She met his eyes, pointedly ignored him—him, whom all Seville stopped to watch ! The fringe of her shawl trailed across the boot of his crossed leg. A subtle perfume came suddenly to his nostrils. She put her hand carelessly to her head, looking straight in front of her—and the red carnation fell at his feet. He stared after her, but she did not so much as hint a glance towards him. Was it accident—or did she mean . . . ? His face flushing, he bent down, picked up the flower.

For a moment he hesitated, and then he sprang to his feet. " I am going to follow her ! " he said.

" Steady, *hombre* ! " his manager restrained him. " Wait a few days—until after Thursday—there is always time ! "

The matador shook himself free. He was Manuelito. Who was there who should impose restrictions upon him ! His simple, essentially peasant-lad soul went straight for its desires, contemptuous of considerations not immediately present.

He flung silver upon the table, strode quickly into the street, among the throng that parted for him. Juan Hernandez followed, cursing under his breath. The red shawl had disappeared. She had turned down one of those short, narrow side-streets which lead to the carriage-way of the Calle de Tetuan. Manuelito hastened after her, round

the corner. There she was!—a splash of colour almost at the end of the street. Before he could overtake her, she had reached the further thoroughfare, had mounted, with her *dueña*, into a waiting carriage. It drove off.

He hastened to the spot, stopped, exasperated to find no cab in sight. Her carriage swerved around a corner, vanished. Was it fancy—or did he see a backward glance? His manager caught him up, puffing heavily.

"No follies, man!" he repeated, imploringly. "We can always find her—later on—after Thursday!"

Manuelito scowled at him, without a word.

Hernandez slipped an arm through his, spoke caressingly.

"You don't want to quarrel with Gregorio, man!" he said. "He is your friend. Come home! Your mother is expecting you. And there are those contracts to consider. *Anda!*"

He drew him along the street, in the direction of the palatial home that Manuelito had acquired for himself in the centre of Seville. The matador acquiesced, frowning and silent. Gregorio! Gregorio was suddenly antipathetic to him.

They halted before a pair of tall, wrought-iron gates that pierced one of those lofty, forbidding, featureless stone walls typical of Sevillian architecture, passed from the hot sunshine into a cool *patio*, green with palms and murmurous with a fountain. Beyond its surrounding colonnades opened the rooms of the dwelling. In the gloom of one of these apertures glimmered the candle-lit gold, sparkling here and there with jewels, of an altar. It was the costly oratory he had installed to that beneficent Virgin who particularly protected him. Here, on the days of bull-fights, his mother prayed, for many hours upon her knees, until she received the telegram announcing his safety. She came towards him now, a stunted little peasant woman, quaintly incongruous in this splendour, her wrinkled old face lighting up at the sight of him. Her smile changed to swift anxiety at his frowning brows.

"*Hijo!*" she said, arresting him with a touch upon his arm. "What is it? What is wrong?"

"*Nada,*" he replied curtly, brushing past her and entering the house.

Mother and manager exchanged a quick glance of concern. They followed him into the great salon, furnished *carte blanche* by a Madrid firm in the style of that of an ancient Spanish grandee. At the further end a massive carved oak table was littered with documents.

Juan Herandez once more slipped his arm through the young man's.

"*Anda,* Manuelito!" he said. "Let us decide about these contracts."

He led him up to the chair by the table, pushed him gently into it, spread out the documents, commenced to explain them.

The matador frowned at them for a moment or two, and then sprang up impulsively.

"Juan!" he said. "It's no use—I can see her all the time—that red shawl, like a picture!—Juan! I must see her—I must get to know her—to-night!—before Gregorio returns!"

The manager looked at him in alarm.

"But, *hombre!*" he expostulated. "Wait! There is plenty of time. After Thursday——"

"To-night!" repeated the young man insistently. "To-morrow Gregorio will return!"

The mother sought the eyes of the manager.

"What is it, Juan?" she asked. "What is the matter with the boy?"

Hernandez explained briefly, emphasising the necessity for Manuelito to keep a cool head for Thursday's bull-fight, his first since he returned from America. No follies until then!

The old woman pondered a moment, looking at her fashionably-elegant son with shrewd peasant's eyes. For all the apparent contrast, she was his origin, understood him to the depths. She lifted her shoulders in a tolerance that maternal love redeemed from cynicism.

"Let the lad have his way, Juan. It will do less harm than if he frets."

The manager protested energetically.

"But Gregorio! She is"—he hesitated, in respect—"she is the *querida* of Gregorio! We cannot have a scandal before Thursday. They *torear* together!"

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

"They are men—and they must settle it like men, between them. We cannot stop these things, Juan." Her tone implied an experience of '*estas cosas*,' too profound to be scandalised.

The young man ended the argument. He spoke as the master.

"Juan! Lolita dances to-night?"

"Yes."

"Get me a ticket for the front row."

The manager went out with an upthrow of his hands.

. . . . . .

The theatre, like most Spanish variety houses, was architecturally a poor affair, resembling rather a second-rate concert-hall, with straight walls, a comparatively low ceiling, and, at the end remote from the stage, a small balcony. The performance began at 10 p.m. but the 'star' turns would not appear until between 12 and 1 in the morning. Manuelito in his smartest lounge-suit (the majority of Spaniards leave evening-dress to the waiters), his little matador's pig-tail coiled upon his head, sat, with Juan at his side, in the front row of the comfortless seats, close up to the diminutive orchestra vigorously fiddling the latest air from Madrid.

On the stage a woman no longer young, her obesity bursting from her tightly-fitting, low-cut evening gown, sang, with exaggerated gesture and a raucous voice, a song whose every couplet ended with '*amor*'. It was midnight, and the artiste, billed for this late hour, was obviously considered a popular favourite. But her day was done; the public was tired of her. She had a minimum of three songs to sing, whatever her reception; if she were applauded she would sing five or six. There was little chance of that. This was her third song, and failure now meant probably termination of her engagement. The first two had been scarcely audible in the storm of hisses. The

third was drowned in a tempest of mocking derision. Cat-calls and jeers answered each other from balcony to *butacas*. The theatre seemed alive with vicious serpents, stirred up to savage animosity.

The perspiration broke through the paint on the singer's face, her eyes filled with tears, yet, with a desperate effort of will, she forced herself to smile in a piteous assumption of the gay coquette, forced her voice, more raucous than ever, to overcome the hideous noise that killed the spirit in her. The audience laughed in enjoyment of its own cruelty, abandoning itself to that instinct of the herd which bands itself for the annihilation of a member no longer required. Manuelito hissed and laughed with the rest. Behind him he heard a man's voice in cynically contemptuous comment to his companion: "Bah! the public of *los toros!*" The laugh died in Manuelito's throat. It was his public, too—for this merciless public that he risked his life.

The curtains fell together from the wings. For a moment or two the orchestra repeated the refrain of the last song, then it broke into a new melody—the strongly accentuated rhythm, liltingly gay and yet touched with a naïve melancholy, terminating with a run down the scale to an emphasised note at the end of the musical phrase, of a popular Sevillian tune. The curtains parted once more. Castanets sounded, rhythmic with the orchestra, from somewhere behind the wings of an empty stage. The orchestra was drowned suddenly in a tumultuous outburst of hand-claps. Lolita 'la Sevillana' floated, pirouetting on tip-toe, from the wings to the centre under the following spot-light, her arms bent outwards for the play of the castanets that rattled with incredible rapidity in her hands, yet kept time to those almost inaudible violins whose more significant stresses she accentuated with a stamp of her heel upon the boards.

Manuelito applauded with all his might. Something swelled in his breast as he gazed at her, a white, long-fringed shawl, gorgeously embroidered with immense red roses, hanging from her shoulders yet allowing glimpses of her lithely sinuous form, her black hair crowned with an

immense comb from which fell a mantilla of magnificent white lace, her breast and fingers a-glitter with jewels, her features—so startlingly beautiful that renewed sight of them gave him a peculiar shock at his heart—radiant with the pleasure of the delirious applause that temporarily silenced the music.

She danced as those dance who have a genius for the art, with an emanation of personality which is more important than the skilfully performed technicalities of mere talent, yet with a perfection of physical co-ordination that fascinates the watching eye. One felt emotions pass over her, as clouds pass across the moon, as she varied, in time and measure with the music, the expression of that body in incessant movement. The frown that furrowed between her eyebrows broke into a dazzing smile, the smile relapsed into a yearning, half-timorous appeal that melted into a smile again.

Magnetism radiated from her—that peculiar magnetism which draws masculinity without a spoken word, a magnetism emphasised by a deliberate sensuous allurement. Her skirts ballooned from her like a bell as she pirouetted with a demoniac rattle of the castanets, permitting a brief glimpse of white underwear—fell with a backward swish around her legs as she changed her step. She danced like one possessed, dancing for the sheer joy of it, impersonally indifferent to that audience which held no individual who was real to her.

Manuelito sat, itching for the opportunity to applaud again, in that theatre now silent and spell-bound by the ancient magic of the dance. He watched, with an intense concentration of all himself, that provocatively beautiful woman, swaying, turning, flitting round the stage on toes that pattered to the time or suddenly checking with heels that stamped sonorously in emphasis. The ceaseless clatter of the castanets seemed to envelop her in an atmosphere to which something primitive in him responded. The glare of the footlights between her and his comparative obscurity, like the fire-circle of savage sorcery, enhanced her illuminated personality with the glamour of a world apart. It seemed impossible that he could ever attain

contact with this bewitching creature, absorbed in her performance, whose smile remained so exasperatingly impersonal. Yet he was determined to achieve it. He shouted his approval with an enthusiastic "*Bonita! Muy bonita!*" intended to catch her attention.

It succeeded. She danced down to the footlights, her shawl floating, her skirt twirling, her high-heeled shoes stamping to the measure, her arms weaving the clatter of the castanets about her. She recognised him, recognised him with a direct smile that gave him a shock, with a look into his eyes that went straight to his innermost. Thereafter it seemed to him that she danced for him alone. It was a dance of tantalising provocation, of seduction turning capriciously to disdain, of coquetry that slyly suggests the ultimate surrender and teasingly postpones it in an affectation of aversion. And as she danced her eyes sought his, an enigmatic smile curving the vivid red of her lips. He watched her, fascinated, crouching in his seat as though the primitive man in him instinctively made ready for a leap upon the stage, every muscle tense. She flaunted before him, the jewels on neck and bosom flashing in the shaft of light from the balcony.

He heard that cynical voice behind him murmuring to his companion.

"What jewels! They cost Gregorio——!" The amount was inaudible. Gregorio! He hated Gregorio, savagely.

The dance continued, focussing his attention once more, sending Gregorio to the unillumined background of his mind. It quickened swiftly, in a whirlwind of clattering castanets, to the frenzy of the climax—ceased with one last stamp of her foot to the last note of the music.

The applause burst forth in an instantaneous tumult of shouts and hand-claps that renewed themselves frantically in ever-accentuated spasms. The audience raved. She stood, bowing graciously, smiling at this ovation. Her eyes sought Manuelito. He, too, was applauding in wild enthusiasm, striving to out-do the rest. Then, as her eyes met his, he remembered something. He bent quickly to below his seat, drew out a magnificent bouquet. He had meant to present it at the end of her performance, but his

eager soul could not wait. Now! He flung it across the footlights. It fell at her feet, an immense cluster of vivid red carnations—matched to that one she had so enigmatically dropped. She picked up the bouquet and smiled. Then, as he watched her with a thumping heart, she detached one bloom, stuck it coquettishly, significantly, in her hair—smiled again, straight into his eyes. He gasped, his head dizzy.

The curtains fell, shutting her off from the audience. The orchestra recommenced, playing over again the last tune while the dancer changed her costume for the next appearance. Manuelito turned to his manager, his eyes preternaturally bright.

"Juan!" he said, breathlessly. "Go round—you can do these things better than I can—arrange that I am presented to her afterwards."

The manager commenced an expostulation.

"Go!" commanded the matador imperiously. "Quickly!"

Left alone, he heard behind him the voice of that cynical spectator.

"Yes—Gregorio——" The remark was indistinct in the general noise. "He is as jealous as a cat! No. Manuelito—the *corrida* on Thursday. Yes. Both of them!"

Manuelito waited ages for Juan to return. The orchestra had commenced a different tune, the curtains had gone up, Lolita was once more dancing, in the dress of a Galician peasant-girl, her arms akimbo, her abdomen thrust forward, her shoulders bent back, in a strutting, foot-stamping promenade of the stage, when the manager re-appeared.

"Well?" queried the young man, in feverish suspense.

"I had only one word with her," said Juan, not concealing his distaste for the result. "Yes—with pleasure!"

To Manuelito the dances which followed, each one, if possible, more enthusiastically applauded than its predecessor, were an exasperation. He had lost interest in the dramatic performance. It was the woman herself whom he craved—that woman who still sent him covert glances, tantalisingly ambiguous in their significance, as she turned with dainty feet alive with the melody of the violins,

who smiled inscrutably in the instant before she frowned in the disdain that might or might not be proper to the dance, who hinted her sex in the suggestive gestures in character with these folk-impersonations, and then mocked desire with a swift reversion to the shyness of the village maiden; that woman who, in whatever costume she appeared, was so fascinatingly beautiful, so seductively alluring in face and sinuously mobile figure, that a madness burned in him as he watched her. Gregorio! Who was Gregorio that he should stand between him and this!

The curtains at last went down with finality upon her performance. Even as she stood bowing her acknowledgments to the vociferating audience, Manuelito rose from his seat, pushed his way out through the crowd. Juan at his heels, he made his way to the stage-door. They were admitted at once, the *portero* in respectful familiarity venturing a compliment to the famous matador.

They penetrated along a narrow, once-whitewashed passage, halted in front of a door on which was tacked a card with the name: 'Lolita.' Manuelito hesitated, suddenly as self-consciously awkward as that peasant-lad he was before an enthusiastic mob carried him in triumph round the bull-ring, acclaiming him the first matador of Spain. It was Juan who tapped at the door.

"*Adelante!*" cried a woman's voice from within.

The door opened. It was the old *dueña* who smirked at them.

"Come in, *señores*!"

They entered, Juan leading, found themselves in a cell-like dressing-room, the walls whitewashed over the visible bricks. In front of a long mirror sat Lolita, the plain, red silk shawl over her shoulders. She turned in a welcoming smile. Juan stepped forward for the presentation.

"Permit me, Señorita—our greatest and bravest *maestro* of the bull-ring, Señor Manuel Pérez."

Her smile quickened fascinatingly as she extended her hand. The matador bowed over it, kissed the finger-tips, stammered something meaningless to himself. For a moment everything seemed paralysed in him. Her presence overwhelmed him as no woman's had ever done before. He

raged inwardly at his own rusticity. Then he asserted himself in the easiest fashion, turned to his manager.

"Juan!" he said in a tone of authority. "Wait for me outside!"

Juan obeyed. Manuelito glanced questioningly at the *dueña* and then at that dazzling vision seated before the mirror. She smiled again.

"The señora remains with me—always," she said, calmly mistress of the situation.

He stood awkwardly, not knowing how to begin. Then he plunged desperately.

"I came—Señorita——" he stammered, hesitated, lost himself, utterly tongue-tied.

"You came—Señor——?" she helped him.

He stared at her. Her magnificent eyes rested upon him, revealing nothing of her own thought, awaiting his speech. A fascinating smile parted over her white teeth. While she waited, her hands went to her hair. She adjusted in its black lustrous masses a red carnation, *his* flower! His gaze fell to the red silk shawl loosely over her shoulders, and suddenly boldness returned to him. Perhaps his nature had approximated itself to those bulls who were the business of his life, perhaps it was but a note of familiar aspect reviving his audacity of the afternoon—but he sprang forward in blind impulse, like one of his own bulls at a red rag, flung himself on his knees before her, clutched at her hand. His words came in a rush.

"I came, Señorita—because I love you! Because you are my life! I cannot live without you! Señorita!—Lolita!—I love you! I love you!"

He looked up to her eyes. They contemplated him, but he could not interpret their expression.

"Lolita! You love me? You wear that flower because you love me?"

She sighed, turned away her head, attempted in vain to withdraw her hand from his strong grasp. The *dueña*, on a chair at the other side of the dressing-room, remained as impassible as a statue.

"Lolita!" His voice trembled with eager passion. "Lolita! You love me? You are not playing with me?

You love me as I love you? Lolita!—Speak! Answer me—my life—my love!"

Her great eyes came round to him. Her breast swelled under its corsage. Her smile was a tender melancholy.

"I cannot——" she murmured, as though scarcely trusting herself to speak. "I dare not!"

"Dare not!" He sprang to his feet, splendidly virile. Her eyes lit up involuntarily at his handsomeness. "Who shall prevent you?" he asked, wrathfully.

Her voice was still a murmur, a murmur touched with despair.

"Gregorio! He will kill me——"

He laughed in bitter scorn.

"Gregorio! I will soon settle Gregorio!"

She looked at him, in perfidious surprise.

"But Gregorio is your friend! He often speaks of you."

He tapped angrily with his foot upon the floor.

"That is finished!"

He threw himself again upon his knees in front of her.

"Lolita! Tell me!—You are tired of Gregorio?"

She looked down upon him, her face a mystery of emotion, breathed, almost inaudibly, the one word.

"Yes!"

He seized her hand, kissed it with passionate fervour. Then, fired by the contact, his grasp slid suddenly up her arm to her neck, dragging her mouth down to his. He almost overbalanced, flung off by an altogether unexpected strength. She sprang up from her chair.

"No!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "No! Not while Gregorio lives!"

He stared at her.

"You mean—?" he asked, incredulously.

"What I say!" She seemed transfigured, this beautiful woman whose eyes blazed at him. "Not while Gregorio lives!"

"You mean——" he stammered in horrified amazement; "you mean that I should kill Gregorio myself? But—but Gregorio is my friend——!"

She smiled scornfully.

"You said that was finished!"

" Besides," he went on, his eyes fixed on hers, " if I kill him myself, I shall be arrested. How will that help ? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" There are ways. How should I know ? You work together in the bull-fight on Thursday—it ought to be easy." She paused, looking him in the eyes with an indefinable expression. " If a man really loves ! " The doubt stung him like an insult.

He drew a deep breath, clutched at her arm, pulled her close to him. Their eyes still held each other.

" Lolita ! " His voice was hoarse. " You love me ? You really love me ? "

Seduction seemed to emanate from her, even rigid and expressionless as she was. He trembled as he gripped her arm. She softened suddenly, with a smile that sent fire through him, relaxing voluptuously to his touch.

" Yes ! " she whispered, in intoxicating confession.

He flung both arms around her on the instant, strove for her lips in a madness of desire that overwhelmed him.

" Lolita ! " he cried. " I love *you* ! I will do—anything ! Anything—I love you ! Kiss me !—Kiss me ! You must ! —you shall ! " He strained forward for the lips refused with a throw-back of the beautiful head. " Lolita !—I can't wait ! You must ! "

She wriggled in his grasp with a dancer's lithe muscles of steel, broke away from him. Like lightning her hand went to her stocking, flashed into the air again, glittering in the electric-light. A long, thin poniard, gleaming from the flashing jewels of her fingers, was upraised upon him

He stepped back, instinctively dodging the blow.

" Go ! " She pointed to the door, her face terrible in a tiger-cat fury. " I shall be at the *corrida* on Thursday. Come back to me when—when Gregorio is dead ! "

With one last look at her, he went.

. . . . . .

The bullfighters clustered together in the gloom of the arched passage which led to the arena. From beyond the great wooden gates which closed it they heard the murmur of the eager multitude, the faint, spasmodic notes of a brass

band. In a few moments the procession would be formed, those gates would be thrown open, and these modern gladiators would march out to possible death.

They made ready now. The picadors in their short, black or dark-green, braided jackets, clumsy with the heavy iron armour underneath the yellow leather of their legs, were helped up into the saddle of their wretched horses, bandaged over one eye. The banderilleros, in blue and mauve and green overlaid with silver, played nervously with the brightly-coloured cloaks thrown over their shoulders. The matadors, Gonzalez, Gregorio and Manuelito, resplendent in their golden, tight-fitting costumes, their clubbed pig-tails sticking out under their black hats, stood each apart with their personal servants, arranging the gorgeous cloaks that hung loosely over their left arms. All: picadors, banderilleros and matadors alike, were silent, their faces pale, the perspiration glistening on their brows.

Manuelito trembled with suppressed excitement, with a curious feeling of imminent event. Normally he went into the arena with a coolness he flaunted against the nervous tension of the other professionals. Now he was keyed-up to a motiveless exasperation he vented upon his servant. He had not seen Lolita since he went out of her dressing-room. Her last words haunted him now, reiterated over and over again by some inner voice to which he listened: "I shall be at the *corrida* on Thursday—come back to me when Gregorio is dead!" He glanced across to the stolidly peasant-like figure of Gregorio. He had not yet exchanged a word with him. His rival, in fact, had only just arrived. He had a sudden vision of his wizened little mother praying for his own safety in the splendid oratory beyond his cool green *patio*.

Gregorio came across to him. His face was set and stern.

"Manuelito!" he said, and his voice was that of a man who will not be trifled with. "We have been friends—you and I. Each to his own—you understand?" Voice and eyes united in an unspoken threat.

Manuelito's heart leaped. *Gregorio knew*! Before he could answer, the great gates swung open, flooding the archway with daylight. The procession was formed.

Both matadors sprang to their places at the head of it, behind the two *alguaciles* on their prancing horses.

To the blare and crash of a brass band, lost in that immense amphitheatre, the procession emerged from the archway into the blinding glare of the sunshine which scorched the nearer half of the far-stretching circle of smooth sand. In front marched the three matadors widely spaced from each other, behind them at similar intervals came the banderilleros and the mounted picadors of the three *cuadrillas*, behind the picadors walked the red-shirted ' monos '—modern representatives of the slaves of the arena, behind the ' monos ' came the gaily-decked, bell-jangling teams of mules that would presently drag away the carcases.

Manuelito marched, thrilling to the welcoming murmur of that multitude tiered around him in a vast circle of tiny human faces, level with his comrades across that sharp bisection of shadow thrown by the afternoon sun, into the coolness of the shaded space, heading towards the president's box, colonnaded with all those of the wealthy of Seville above the densely-packed spectators in the ' Sombra '. His eye ranged along that lofty balcony, hung with the magnificent shawls of the mantilla'd ladies who sat leaning over to the procession in the excitement of the opening moment. But it was not for the president's box that he was looking. His eyes sought to recognise one beautiful face in those thousands of faces—was caught by the vivid red of an outspread shawl, whose plainness contrasted conspicuously with the elaborate embroideries of all the others that dangled their fringes below the lower edge of the balcony. It was Lolita !

The procession halted, saluted the president. He gazed up still towards that red shawl, caught a glimpse of a face behind it that made his heart beat fast. He glanced at Gregorio. Gregorio was also looking up to that conspicuous shawl.

There was a blast of trumpets, and the procession dispersed. The mules galloped out of the ring, with those picadors not yet required. The three picadors who would wound the first bull with their lances spurred their wretched hacks to widely-separated positions against the wooden

barrier which protected the spectators and afforded a gangway of refuge to the bullfighters. Half-a-dozen banderilleros remained in the arena, with two matadors. The others retired into the gangway.

There were six bulls to be killed, one by each matador in succession twice over. For each bull two *cuadrillas* worked in concert, the second matador standing by in case of emergency—Gregorio's troup assisting Gonzalez for the first combat, then Gonzalez's with Manuelito's, and his with Gregorio's.

The trumpets sounded. The gate of the *toril* was thrown open, a great black bull rushed furiously into the arena. Manuelito took no notice of it, or of the subsequent thrilling episodes which sent that vast multitude shouting mad with excitement. That bull was for Gonzalez, or failing, him, for Gregorio. During the fifteen minutes that the fight lasted he stood in the gangway, gazing up to that red shawl, endeavouring to entice a glance from the face behind it.

A roar of voices in delirious acclamation told him that the first bull was killed. It was his turn. Throwing his ceremonial cloak to his servant and taking the one stained with many combats, he vaulted over the barrier to the arena where his picadors were already cantering to position and his banderilleros, along with those of Gonzalez, stood ready with their capes. The murmur of the multitude died away into a tense hush as the gates closed behind the mules dragging off the dead bull. Fourteen thousand pairs of eyes fixed themselves on that gate whence the next would appear. Now! He would show them how a bull should be killed! He glanced up to that red shawl spread over the balcony.

The trumpets sounded. An instant later an infuriated beast, dazzled by the sudden sunshine, was chasing hither and thither over the arena, flinging one picador after another with a ghastly thud against the wooden barrier as his horns gored and lifted the wretched horses, sending the cape-men flying for the safety of the gangway.

Manuelito dashed into the centre, displaying his cape provocatively, inciting the animal, now streaming blood

and exasperated from the lance-wounds of the picadors, to charge. It came at him in a rush. He awaited it, flung his cape across its eyes, dodged to one side. The bull swung round upon him, surprisingly nimble, drove at him with lowered horns. Once more the cape fluttered over its eyes, once more the matador stepped aside just sufficiently for the charge to miss. The vast amphitheatre resounded to one immense, simultaneous shout of appreciation—"*Olé-e-e!*" He fluttered the cape again, playing as another man would with a dog with that savage animal that rushed at him, wheeling swiftly, again and again and again with intent to kill. And at each hair's-breadth escape, each outfling of the cape that marked another triumph of nerve and skill, that deafening shout thundered from the encircling amphitheatre in a simultaneity of fourteen thousand human throats—"*Olé!—Olé-e!! Olé-e-e!!!*"

He made a sign to his troupe standing with their capes ready, left the bull to them, retired a pace or two, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. He was distant now from that red shawl he had almost forgotten in the necessary concentration of his mind upon the bull. Released from immediate preoccupation with danger, he wondered if she had admired.

The trumpets sounded the end of this first act. Now followed the *suerte de banderillear*. The picadors retired. His own three banderilleros abandoned their cloaks, took each a pair of barbed darts, with shafts covered with brightly-coloured paper, from an attendant at the barrier. The bull, naturally, ignored this arbitrary division of the performance. It still rushed first at one then at another of the remaining cape-men. Once more he took a hand himself, trailing his cape, baffling the bewildered bull, enticing it to the centre of the arena, getting it into position for the planting of the darts. Once more the amphitheatre roared its appreciation.

He stood aside. One of his troupe placed himself, distant from the rest in a conspicuous isolation, some twenty yards from the bull. He balanced himself on his toes, a long, brightly-coloured dart in each hand, waving them upward with quick jerks, tempting the bull to charge.

The animal perceived him, hurled himself forward to inflict death upon this insolence. The banderillero awaited the rush with arms high in the air—thrust them down over those murderous horns just as the bull was upon him—skipped to one side. The bull hurtled onwards, the pair of banderillas dangling from the skin of his shoulders, amid another outburst of fourteen thousand human voices shouting as one.

A second and a third banderillero planted his darts in a repetition of the action of the first. The maddened bull careered furiously after his tormentors, three pairs of barbed darts clicking against each other as he tried to shake them from his back. The amphitheatre laughed in its delight.

Once more the trumpets sounded, this time for the final act—the *suerte de matar*. Manuelito went to the barrier, threw aside his cloak, took from the sheath held out by his servant a bright, thin sword with a scarlet hilt and guard. Instead of the cape, he picked up a small square of red cloth, the *muleta*. Then, bare-headed, his hat in one hand the sword in the other, he took up the traditional attitude with his face towards the spectators in the 'Sombra'. This was the '*brindar*'—the dedication of his life or the bull's. Gonzalez had dedicated the first bull to the president. He dedicated this to that beautiful face behind that vivid red shawl, up to which he gazed—flung his hat among the spectators in gage of his determination.

Behind him, his troupe was still playing the bull with capes that attracted it first to this side then to that. They withdrew as he advanced steadily towards the animal, his glittering sword concealed under the square of red cloth spread over it. Gonzalez, cloak in hand, lingered near, ready to assist his fellow-matador if need be.

The bull, tired now, its dart-hung back streaming blood, its flanks heaving, its tongue lolling in froth, looked at him, taking stock of this new, bright-red object that advanced for its further torture. With lowered horns, it pawed the sand of the arena. Then, suddenly, it rushed. Manuelito, his eyes fixed steadily upon the bull's, had stopped at its first movement. With that red rag

displayed upon his sword he awaited it, swept the cloth over the bull's face, touched its horns with his left hand in his left side-step as it passed. The amphitheatre yelled in ecstasy.

Then Manuelito commenced that daring *muleta*-play of the matador before he kills his bull. Close up to the horns, he seemed to dance with it as with graceful turns and a minimum of avoidance he swept his *muleta*, using only that right hand which held his sword, over and under and across the bull's forehead in those eagerly-watched passes which are as traditional as the steps in a minuet. Focussed upon the animal until he seemed to be almost one with it, divining its next movement almost before it commenced, he scarcely heard the roar of acclamation which greeted every pass. He knew only, with that intimate satisfaction of the artist, that he was giving a superb and perfect display of his art, his step sure, his body pliant to a nicety, his arm outstretched with the *muleta*-concealed sword exquisitely dexterous to make the pass, his eye unerring, his nerve so faultless that this great beast that snorted in its rage seemed but as a lamb that frisked with him. The amphitheatre raved and roared around him.

It was sufficient. For a few moments he abandoned the bull to the cape-play of his troupe while he rested, mopping his sweating brow.

Then he advanced again—this time for the kill. Yet again, solitary although with Gonzalez hovering near, he played the bull with his *muleta*, baffling it, bewildering it to immobility. The animal stood stock still, slavering at the mouth. He drew his glittering blade from the concealment of the *muleta*, stepped up close to the bull's horns, stretched his sword over them, parted with its point the darts that would impede his thrust. The beast did not move. It looked at him with dull eyes that meditated evil. That vast circle of close-packed human beings held its breath like one man, in a hush of tense suspense. He placed himself before the bull, close up, his sword outstretched, aiming at that one difficult spot between its shoulder-bones where his blade would not be deflected.

He stood thus, poised, for a long moment, all his

being concentrated on that bull. He read, suddenly, in its eyes the impulse to charge. On the instant he flung himself forward, thrust, with lightning-velocity and with all his strength, deep into the bull's back, recovered his equilibrium.

The bull stood motionless for yet another moment, its eyes fixed on him, the sword left up to its hilt behind its shoulders. Then a gush of blood came from its mouth, its fore-legs flexed suddenly—it went down with a thud—dead.

It was a master-thrust. Rarely does the first succeed. That vast amphitheatre resounded to one deafening shout of acclamation that would not cease. On all the benches, figures arose in tumult, fluttering white handkerchiefs, gesticulating towards the president, clamouring for him an ovation—the supreme honour of the bull's ear. The president gave the signal. Manuelito walked quickly around the arena, bowing his acknowledgments, under a rain of hats flung in the enthusiasm of their wearers.

In a sudden thrill of anticipation he gazed up to that conspicuous shawl for his supreme reward—was on the instant stabbed with a bitter dsappointment. The mantilla-draped head behind it gave no sign of animation. In all those fourteen thousand pairs of hands that clapped frantically, those fourteen thousand faces that shouted in wild excitement, she alone was motionless, disdained to applaud. He ground his teeth in an emotion he could not define, furious with resentment. For this open scorn he had made the best fight of his life ! He accepted the gore-clotted ear of the bull, solemnly presented to him, with a curt indifference. Nothing mattered to him, nothing—except—— He was in the mood to kill humans.

The trumpets sounded once more. The ring was cleared. This was Gregorio's bull. Manuelito's *cuadrilla* supported him, and he himself would remain in the arena, but it would be Gregorio's fight, Gregorio's triumph if he bore himself well. His rival advanced into the circle of sand. Manuelito saw him glance up to that red shawl, saw a handkerchief flutter over the rail of the balcony. The whole arena swam in his sudden jealousy.

Another bull rushed out. The fight proceeded on the

familiar lines—the goring of the picadors' horses, the cape-play of the troupe, of the matador himself. Manuelito stood by, cloak in hand, intervening occasionally. The shouts which acclaimed Gregorio's dexterity smote him like insults offered to himself. He saw from time to time a white handkerchief flutter above that red shawl. Her voice haunted him mockingly: "There are ways—you work together in the bull-fight—come back to me when Gregorio is dead!" He brooded over a possible apparently maladroit throw of his own cape which should trip his rival up under the bull's horns, nerved himself for an opportunity.

The *suerte de banderillear* passed without special incident. The trumpets sounded for the final act. Gregorio went to the barrier, raised his cap, dedicated the bull—even as Manuelito had done—to that pale face behind the conspicuous shawl.

Sword and *muleta* in hand, Gregorio advanced towards his bull. As was his duty, Manuelito hovered near him with cloak that should be ready to attract the bull in case of sudden danger. Gregorio smiled insolently at him. He would show him that he, too, could play and kill a bull!

The *muleta*-dance with the bull commenced, a sudden, simultaneous vociferation applauding each one of Gregorio's bold and graceful passes. He finished his display, rested for the final stroke, advanced again for that ultimate *estocada* that should rival Manuelito's.

He manœuvred the bull so that he himself faced towards that shawl, towards Lolita. Several times he raised his point, only to drop it again as the bull shifted uneasily. Manuelito, close at hand, glanced up towards that red square of silk. Surely it moved! He saw white hands upon it, on the rail. Gregorio, concentrated on the bull, raised his sword once more, poised himself for the fatal thrust. Even as he delivered it, he glanced involuntarily upwards, his eye caught by a vivid, broad red patch that dropped from the balcony.

Manuelito half-saw it, saw his friend slip in a baulked lunge underneath the bull's horns. He forgot everything in his deepest instinct, flung himself between—against a

bull's gigantic hairy head that jerked its horns viciously. He felt a crash against his ribs that knocked the breath out of him, the ground went sickeningly from under his feet, he saw sand passing rapidly under his eyes—went into blackness with a thud he only half-perceived.

. . . . . .

He opened his eyes in his own white bed at home. Gregorio stood over him. The doctor (he knew him of old) looked at him from a corner of the room. What had happened? He puzzled at Gregorio.

"It is nothing." His old comrade smiled reassurance. "Just bruises. You will be on your feet again in a day or two." Gregorio took up the limp hand which lay upon the turned-back sheet, squeezed it. "*Amigo!*" he said, with emotional solemnity, "I owe you my life!"

The door opened. His body-servant came gingerly into the room.

"A lady has called, Señor," he said, "the Señorita Lolita."

Lolita! Manuelito remembered everything. He glanced at Gregorio.

His rival smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can have her, Manuelito," he said. He showed his teeth suddenly at the thought of her. "She dropped that shawl on purpose—the she-devil! I know her. She meant to kill me."

Manuelito turned to his servant.

"Turn her out of the house!" he ordered, curtly.

THE ONE BELOVED

THE ONE BELOVED

If the high gods sit as in a theatre to watch us, diverting themselves with our human comedy—and stirred at times, let us hope, to a divine pity at our tragedies—it is improbable that they restrict their interest to the dramas of that minority of mankind which provides material for the majority of novels. In the immense complexity of life, those fortunate ones who need give no thought to the manner of getting their incomes, who play their parts on a stage set with beautiful country-houses, luxurious town-apartments and fashionable restaurants, who walk amid their fellows with the easy consciousness of being a race superior to those who toil for the daily wherewithal to live, are so few as to be possibly imperceptible—*pace* Homer and his petted favourites of the gods—from the sublime heights of Olympus.

The great, seething mass of humanity whose infinite inter-reactions make the warp and woof of life is composed of individuals with extremely simple souls, of limited outlook and indifferent education, whose chief conscious purpose is to fight off starvation by whatever occupation offers itself. And in the infinite inter-reactions of that mass of very ordinary people arise tragedies as soul-shattering as those of Shakespeare, and comedies that Molière could not have bettered. It is true that the players are imperfectly articulate, but to the high gods it is possible that a drama in a garret is at least as absorbing as the drawing-room intrigue that terminates in the divorce-court.

When the play is done and the players go off-stage, king and beggar doff their costume, and, so humanity

believes—pass on, indistinguishably equal. The high gods perhaps looked down one night, with a thrilled anticipation which more pretentious personages failed to inspire—for the high gods, doubtless, have some inkling of the plot—at a couple of middle-class young men, half-undressed, in a barely furnished cubicle at the top of one of those dingy Georgian mansions that so commonly front each other in deserted streets close behind the pouring, roaring traffic of London's main thoroughfares. This particular house was the 'living-in' establishment for a percentage of the young men employed behind the architectural grandeur of Messrs. Comwrights' granite-pillared façade in Regent Street.

In several similarly dilapidated Georgian houses across the way, Messrs. Comwrights' 'young ladies' lived under similar conditions. To the lofty intelligences which controlled Messrs. Comwrights' colossal business, the two young men were merely 'hands' in the Men's Hosiery Department. To the two young men themselves, they were, very emphatically, highly important human souls, whose lives distinctly mattered. They were, in fact, of the same essential type as the majority of those seven million human beings who, since they find advantage in living in propinquity, create London. They were half-undressed because in a few minutes the lights would be turned off at the master-switch below.

One of the pair, an untidy-headed young fellow with a squat nose and a large mouth in unbeautiful congruity with his freckled face, sat on his bed with an open letter in his hand. His companion had thrown it across to him with a: "What d'you think of that?" He sat now lost in the serious thought evoked by the perusal.

"Denis," he said, looking suddenly up to his companion, "are you really in love with her?"

His room-mate ceased unlacing his boots, removed from his mouth the cigarette he was smoking in defiance of the regulations, and laughed shortly in mockery of this simplicity.

"Come off it, Henry!" he said, brutally.

Henry stared at him and did not smile.

"I think it's rotten of you!" he declared with some vehemence.

Denis Trevor reverted to his boot and wrenched it off to fall with a thud half across the room.

"Oh, chuck it, Henry! None of your Sunday-school. When a fellow goes for a holiday, he isn't expected to be serious with all the girls he meets."

Henry Coggin looked down to the letter in his hand, and his normally plain enough features twisted themselves into an unconscious grotesque. Henry Coggin's deeper thoughts always invested themselves with an expression of mental pain.

"She's taking it seriously, though," he said, and his tone was unappeased.

Denis Trevor rid himself of his other boot.

"I can't help that, man!" he protested, with irritation. "It's not my fault if girls get gone on me."

Henry Coggin glanced across to the curly-headed young man, handsome after the magazine-hero fashion. Fatuous though it sounded, it was true. All the girls went wild over Denis. He was of the eternal type—the conscienceless flame at which the moths singe their wings. Henry Coggin did not sum him up in any such analogy. He had normally the admiration of the inherently humble for the dazzling Denis Trevor, whose impudent liberties even the departmental manager tolerated. But now he felt suddenly hostile.

"She doesn't seem to be the ordinary sort of girl, though," he said, stubbornly defending this unknown victim.

"She isn't," agreed the other. "I don't know what made me pick her up. She's not my sort. Not enough go in her for me." His tone was intended to hint the Lothario.

"Where did you meet her?" asked Henry.

"On the pier. She looks after some old aunt or other. Orphan, she told me." Denis continued his undressing. "Long yarn—I've forgotten it." He yawned.

"She's pretty, I suppose?" queried Henry, doggedly sticking to the subject.

"Oh, pretty enough—in a sort of way. Tragedy queen style. On her high horse before you know where you are.

She's not my sort, I tell you. She's about your mark, Henry—reads books and all that—takes life seriously."

Henry Coggin flushed a little at the implied sneer, but he ignored it.

"Then you don't mean to marry her?" he asked, in naïve surprise.

"Marry her!" echoed Denis. "Good God, no! When I marry, it's going to be a woman with money, I assure you. I'm going to start a business of my own, and I don't mind telling you, Henry, I'm going to make a fortune. I'm that sort. Harrods, Whiteleys, Barkers—all the big concerns, started with a small London shop. Just give me the chance, and I'll do the same. I wish to Heaven little Kitty had some money—I'd marry her like a shot. She's got the brains, she has."

Kitty Fisher was the fluffy-haired, bright particular star of Messrs. Comwrights' millinery department, and might be seen on any evening of the week entering expensive restaurants in clothes certainly not purchased out of her exiguous salary. "If Kitty and I could set up together, we'd be millionaires in ten years!" he ended with enthusiasm.

Henry Coggin frowned, indifferent to this eulogy of the only-too-famous Kitty. His mind, once concentrated on a subject, was not easily diverted.

"But this girl," he said, "—it sounds from her letter as though you had promised to marry her."

Denis laughed.

"God knows what I promised!" Henry Coggin's frown deepened. "Just as if a fellow meant all he said!"

Henry got up slowly.

"Denis," he said, "you're a cad!"

Denis, on the point of getting into bed, turned and faced him.

"What do you mean?" he challenged angrily.

"This girl"—Henry Coggin stammered awkwardly in the vehemence of his feelings—"this girl you've played with—she isn't the ordinary sort—this," he waved the letter nervously in his hand, "this is the real thing—it's—it's," he hesitated as though before pronouncing a sacred word, "it's love!"

"I don't care what it is!" Denis flared back at him. "I've got no use for it. And mind your own business, anyway!"

Henry Coggin's grotesquely plain features went grotesquely stern.

"Denis," he said, "do you mean to tell me that you're going to let this girl down?"

Denis shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm going to drop her, if that's what you mean," he answered defiantly.

"You're not going to answer this letter?"

"Of course not!"

He flinched from the look in Henry Coggin's eyes, and clambered into bed. Henry stood over him.

"D'you realise what you're throwing away?" he asked. "Good God, if a girl wrote a letter like that to me——!" He broke off. No girl had ever written a love-letter to Henry Coggin.

Denis pulled the bed-clothes over himself.

"Well, answer it yourself then, if you take so much interest in her. You can keep the damned letter!"

"It's you she wants, not me," said Henry Coggin, unconsciously pitiful.

"Well, answer it in my name then, if you're so damned keen about it. She doesn't know my writing. I don't care what you say—so long as you don't let me in for marrying her." The light went out suddenly, plunging the room into pitch blackness with Henry yet to undress. "There you are, you silly ass! That's what you get for worrying yourself about other people's concerns——"

In that dark night where Henry Coggin listened to Denis Trevor's slumberful breathing, the high gods watched the temptation of Henry Coggin's lonely soul—and doubtless nudged each other when he fell.

Henry had some difficulty in keeping the tremor out of his voice when, next morning, he asked the question he had resolved upon in those silent hours where the fantastic seems possible.

"Did you mean what you said last night, Denis? You know——" he checked with an instinctive delicacy.

"Sure!" said Denis, carelessly. "Serve the little fool right if she's taken in! You can kid her all you like —so long as you're careful. I don't want an action for breach."

Then commenced a new era for the unattractive, snub-featured Henry Coggin. All that day the periphery of him praised assortments of ties and socks to customers who were like ghosts. His real inner self brooded over every word of a letter that he knew by heart until his original hungry wish that such a letter had been addressed to him was almost lost in the illusion that it was.

The personality of that unknown Vera Annesley became vividly alive to him, irresistibly sympathetic. Just such a girl he had dreamed of: warm-hearted, high-souled. It almost seemed that she had spoken directly to him although believing herself to address another. He salved his conscience,plucking this stolen fruit, with the imagination of an eventual confession where she accepted him romantically, recognising his hidden worth, like the enchanted prince in the fairy story face to face at last with his lady.

When that evening, in the solitude of his cubicle, he sat himself down to write his letter he forgot Denis Trevor. He wrote as though only he and Vera Annesley existed in the world. There was perhaps the germ of a poet under the unpromising exterior of Henry Coggin. It flowered suddenly. He was inspired. His pen wrote of itself with an eloquence that seemed automatic. He did not merely gush. He opened his soul to the sympathy of that Vera Annesley in the certainty that it would be understood, in direct answer to her emotional but obviously sincere letter. He was utterly himself, miraculously raised to the *n*th power—he would have disowned himself had he looked in the mirror—but he signed himself: 'Denis Trevor'.

A day or two later Denis Trevor tossed him an opened envelope with the postmark of a country town. It was the reply, an ebullition of surprised delight, of intimate revelation of a candid nature thrilling to the wonderment of first love. Denis's letter, it seemed, had made her feel ashamed

of her own inadequacy of original appreciation. He was 'bigger,' immensely bigger, than she had imagined.

"I don't know what you said to her, old bean," said Denis, uncomfortably suspicious of complications. "But steady on. A joke's a joke, you know."

It was no joke to Henry Coggin. With burning ears he carried off his letter—*his* letter—the one that had really come in answer to his own. He could not afterwards remember where his body was that day, nor what routine functions it performed.

Week by week, from one month into the next, the correspondence continued. Sometimes Denis opened the letters, to assure himself that the joke had not reached danger-point. More often, pre-occupied with other flirtatious intrigues, he threw them across to Henry Coggin untouched. But he never suggested that it should cease. The situation appealed to his sense of humour. Often, he 'ragged' Henry in the cubicle, inventing farcical tender passages for him, ironically congratulating him on exhibiting Denis Trevor in so romantic a light. And Henry lived secretly in heaven.

Under the pseudonym of Denis Trevor it was he, Henry Coggin, the oft-humiliated butt of the male assistants' dining-room, the ungainly, awkward, pathetically plain-featured little fellow at whom the 'young ladies' tossed their heads with maliciously facetious parodies of his uncouth name; it was he, the despised and rejected, to whom this girl he visualised romantically queen-like opened the treasures of her heart. In cold blood, their correspondence was a real interchange of thoughts, aspirations, and ideals, in remarkable conformity, which evoked in each a genuine and freely-expressed admiration for the other.

Vera Annesley, writing from the almost conventual solitude of her life with an invalid aunt in a small country-town, poured out her soul with a simplicity of hitherto restrained passion that was touching in its artlessness and sublime in its native elevation. She, as much of a recluse as Henry Coggin, had found her fairy prince and gloried in him. Essentially, they were, in a prosaically latter-day

environment and with undeveloped intelligences, an Abelard and Heloïse with the romance yet to come.

Reading her letters, Henry Coggin forgot that she wrote them to that image of the handsome, pleasure-loving face of Denis Trevor before her eyes. They were so directly an answer to his own. He was genuinely in love almost before he knew it; the day when no letter came a misery to him. He beguiled himself to sleep with story-book visions of himself as a knight in armour laying down his life for her. The customers he served little suspected the inner splendour of that stammering, plain-faced assistant who was so humbly obedient to their caprices.

There was obviously an end to this idyll. It came with startling suddenness one morning when Denis Trevor and he were left the last two at the long breakfast-table. Denis tossed him across an unopened letter with the remark that he had forgotten it. Henry flushed red, tore it open, glanced at it, uttered a sharp exclamation, and thrust it into his pocket.

"What's up?" queried Denis. "Let's have a look."

"It's nothing," answered Henry, turning a deeper red and making no movement to give up the letter.

"Nonsense!" said Denis, suddenly alarmed at possible complications which involved him. "You can't bluff me! I know there's something—and I want to see that letter. It's addressed to me."

"It is meant for me," Henry Coggin fenced stubbornly.

"Bosh!" said Denis. "Hand it over—I want to see what you've been using my name for."

That letter announced a revolution. Vera Annesley was coming up that day to stay with some relatives in London, whose address she gave. Her aunt had died suddenly and had left her ten thousand pounds—and she could marry her fairy prince! Henry Coggin felt faint in the imminence of an immense disaster, but he fought it off doggedly.

"No," he said, and he rose from the table.

Denis rose also. His handsome face set hard.

"You hand over that letter—or I report to the manager that you've stolen a letter addressed to me! And I'll hold you till you're searched!"

Henry Coggin stared at him, his unbeautiful eyes those of a menaced animal, his face suddenly white. They would not believe his story, even if he told it. It would mean dismissal—the street! Despair in his soul, he surrendered, plucked the letter from his pocket.

Denis Trevor glanced through it rapidly.

"Oho!" he said, dramatically, and then turned to Henry Coggin. "You can cut yourself right out of this little romance, my friend," he said with pointed significance. "You understand? You're finished. No more letters are required. I'll attend to this myself."

The end of the world had come for Henry Coggin.

"What—what are you going to do?" he stammered.

"What do you think?" answered the other derisively. "Marry her, of course—marry her and start my business!"

Henry Coggin's cry of protest was almost a scream.

"But you can't! If she knew the sort you are——!"

Denis tapped the letter.

"This reads as if she knew me pretty well!" he said, grimly humorous.

"But that letter—that letter was written to me!"

"To *you*!" Denis laughed scornfully. "D'you think she is going to marry *you*? Why, she doesn't even know that you exist!"

Henry Coggin gasped, unable to articulate another word. Denis walked out of the breakfast-room with the letter in his pocket.

All that day was an unending horror to Henry Coggin. The high gods with a taste for ironic comedy must have smiled in tight-lipped appreciation. Once again a poor human with the best and most innocent of intentions had woven the spell which works catastrophe. Had he not written those letters, stealing for his starved soul the romance put temptingly just within his reach, long since the girl's relations with Denis Trevor would have ceased.

And now—Henry Coggin shuddered at the mere thought of it. To him, Denis Trevor was the satanic personification of evil. The imagination of his queen giving herself to him as to a god, tricked into admiring in him all that was really Henry Coggin's secret self, nearly drove him

crazy. He rebelled violently against the probability. But what could he do? He had not noted her London address. Write to the old one, marking the letter to be forwarded? He shrank from the revelation—from her revolted scorn of him, the pitiful Henry Coggin, who had dared to make love to her under false pretences Denis, also, would probably save himself with some plausible tale. He had all the fascination of his personal presence to help him. Henry Coggin beat unavailingly around all the walls of the blackest dungeon of Castle Despair.

That night Denis Trevor returned to his cubicle at the last possible moment before the outer door was locked. There was a satisfied smile on his handsome face.

Henry Coggin looked at him miserably.

"You've seen her?" he asked.

"Rather!" replied the other. "She's not so bad after all—if she weren't so damned shy." There was a pause while he divested himself of his coat and collar. Then he turned to his room-mate, triumph in his voice. "Henry, my lad, at the end of this month I hand in my notice. And within ten years I'll have the biggest business in the West End!"

Henry rose to his feet.

"Denis! Denis!" he pleaded abjectly. "Let me see her—just once!"

Denis looked at him as though measuring his potentialities for rivalry. His nod was an insult.

"Well," he said, "as it happens, you can. She wants me to meet her to-morrow night. You can come with me and I'll leave her with you. I have an appointment I made before I knew anything about this—and I can't break it."

A suspicion shot through Henry Coggin.

"What sort of appointment, Denis?" he asked.

"Never mind what sort of appointment!" snapped the other. "Mind your own business!"

Henry Coggin felt something flare up within him.

"Look here, Denis!" he said with a sudden audacity that surprised himself. "You play straight with that girl—or, by heaven, I'll——"

"You'll what?" interrupted Denis, with withering contempt. "You'll mind you own business! That's

what you'll do You can see the girl to-morrow, because it suits me. But don't try on any of your silly stories. She won't believe them. I've seen to that."

There was no more said that night. Henry Coggin lay and stared at the dark until he grew afraid.

The next day he was so exceptionally stupid that his immediate boss first asked him if he were ill and then threatened to report him to the manager. The hours were eternities. The world seemed to have stopped, paralysed under the menace of a catastrophe. Six-thirty came at last, and with it freedom. Denis bustled past him, hastening towards his quarters to wash and change into spruce clothes for the evening.

"Hurry up, Henry!" he called. "She'll be waiting for us at the corner."

Henry hastened also, with a throbbing heart that nearly choked him.

Ten minutes later the pair of them hurried down the dingy street to where the great red motor-busses rolled past in never-ending procession along Oxford Street. At the corner was a tall girl dressed in black.

Denis greeted her with an elegant ease that was the despair of his companion. She turned a face upon him that was suddenly radiant and as suddenly shy. He indicated his comrade.

"Vera, I want to introduce Mr. Coggin. Henry, this is my *fiancée*."

To Henry it was as though a sword went through him. He extended a lifeless hand, felt himself grinning sheepishly like a fool, murmured something inaudible. He dared only one glance at that girl with whom he had been in such intimate communion. To anyone's eyes she was good-looking. To Henry she was so divinely beautiful that he thought his heart would stop.

When comparatively clear perception emerged from the whirling confusion of his head, he found himself walking down Oxford Street towards Hyde Park in ignored company with the pair. Denis was glibly explaining his embarrassment over the appointment he had forgotten the previous day, and its importance.

"Do you mind?" he asked her.

She made a brave effort to conceal her disappointment.

"Not at all," she said. "I know it must be very important if you say so."

"It is," he assured her. "But you mustn't wander about by yourself. Henry will show you the Park. You can listen to the band. And then Henry will put you on a 'bus. To-morrow we'll go wherever you like, dear."

The affectionate epithet slipped easily off Denis's tongue, but Henry saw the girl start slightly. She was not yet accustomed to the personal utterance of words familiar enough on the written page.

A moment later Denis had bowed with a graceful uplift of his hat, and Henry found himself alone with her.

He felt the sweat pearl on his forehead as they walked in silence side by side. Speech was paralysed in him. She it was who made the first remark, some commonplace comment in obvious commiseration of his ill-bred embarrassment. He scarcely knew what he answered. He stole another look at her. And it was to this divine creature that he had dared to pour out his futile soul! If she suspected!—he did not merely love her now—he adored her as he would a goddess. And then he thought of Denis Trevor. . . .

Henry Coggin was blind to the magnificence of the afterglow of that early August evening against which the trees banked themselves in silhouetted masses, the more distant a sombre purple in the flood of orange-red light. He was scarcely conscious that they had turned in to the Park by the white stone portals through which the purring automobiles of such fashionable society as was left in town emerged in processional succession, abandoning the long avenues now vacant of carriages. The great world was going home to dinner. The thousands of his own class who had entered into their playground, dotting the wide expanse of grass with reclining figures paired almost universally male with female, and afar off conglomerated into a great black mass around the bandstand, evoked in him no participating sense of pleasurable relaxation, the spectre of toil forgotten till the morrow. His mind did not

register their presence. Even the girl at his side, although his body was tremulous with her propinquity, was remote from him, beyond speech. Henry Coggin's soul was concentrated, in a region that had no relation with time or space, upon a problem that appalled him. Could he dare ?

She it was again who broke the silence, bringing him back to his environment, maintaining a conversation carried on with the fringe of the mind. She also, it was evident, was preoccupied with the absent Denis Trevor.

Henry nerved himself to clumsy politeness, suggested that they should sit down. They searched for a seat unoccupied by lovers and at last found it. She smiled at him.

" You have been frowning terribly. Is anything worrying you, Mr.—Mr.—— ? " she hesitated, at a loss for his name.

" Coggin," he said, and blushed. It was a horrible name, his affliction since his schooldays. But, horrible as it was, she had not even remembered it, this girl to whom—he went hot all over at the thought of the letters he had written to her, the letters, all unconsciously, she had written to him.

He ventured now to look at her, his senses steadying. The black of her mourning lent her an elegant dignity which emphasised the delicacy of her features, the emotional largeness of her eyes, the sound simplicity of her type. Oh, he meant all he had written—meant it a thousand times ! He had loved an abstraction—a sympathetic voice which had come to him out of the unseen. The reality lit a living flame in him, a flame that consumed his soul. This was what he had lived for. And he was utterly hopeless, in a wordless respect for this miracle of femininity. Yet Denis Trevor dared to——

He began to speak of him, deplored his absence perfidiously.

It was a topic on which her tongue was loosened. With a face that was softly radiant, she praised her lover, lauded that fidelity to his pledged word which took him from her that night.

" You—you are very fond of him ? " he stammered.

She turned large, sincere eyes upon him, and smiled.

"Do you believe in love at first sight, Mr. Coggin?" she asked.

"Was it that?" He was conscious of a horrible, vague pain somewhere.

She shook her head.

"No," she replied, more to herself than to him, looking straight out across the Park, "that was just infatuation. It was not until afterwards——"

"Afterwards?" He had to force his voice. His heart thumped in him.

She hesitated, met his eyes, recovered confidence, moved to talk by a sympathy greater than she was aware of.

"Those are secrets," she said, and smiled. "Even Denis does not know——"

"Know what?"

"That I only began to really and truly love him when we wrote to each other—when I learned to know the real Denis."

His murmur was inarticulate.

"You think you know Denis," she went on. "But you don't. He is—oh, immensely bigger and finer than he pretends to be. You would never guess unless——" her voice sank to a whisper for herself, "unless you *knew*."

He was silent.

"That is just a manner he puts on. He's shy of showing himself as he really is. He pretends to be cynical and smart. But, oh, I wish he wouldn't! I couldn't now love that first Denis I thought I loved—not now, after I've seen deeper, after the wonderful letters he wrote to me. It has become a habit with him, I suppose. Sometimes, last night, I seemed to be talking with a stranger."

He attained to speech.

"The man who wrote those letters—seemed different?" he stammered.

"Yes . . ." she checked herself. "But of course I *knew*—I knew that the real Denis was there all the time."

He would have given all the world to cry out: 'You did not know! It was I—I—I, Henry Coggin, who wrote those letters!' For one wild moment he envisaged the immense, thrilling possibility. She destroyed it with her next words.

" You don't know how proud I am of him. I think he is the handsomest man I have ever seen, and the most fascinating."

He had a flitting vision of his own face—' Monkey ', they called him at school—as in a mirror.

" And—and you're going to be married ? " he plunged at random.

She smiled happily.

" Almost at once. I have no one who matters to me, except Denis. We're going to do great things, so Denis says ! "

" You believe in him ? " He was immediately terror-stricken at his own boldness.

" Why, of course ! I have absolute faith in him. Nothing could destroy that—you see, no one knows the real Denis as I do ! "

The sky had closed up its magnificence. The Park veiled its distances in crepuscular greys jewelled with long rows of far-off street-lamps. She rose from the seat. Under the large hat her smile was indistinct in the half light.

" I ought not to have talked so much," she said. " I don't know what made me. Will you put me in my 'bus, Mr. Coggin ? "

He protested that he would see her home, but she was inexorable. As far as the 'bus she permitted his company, but no farther. He watched the ponderous vehicle roll away, diminishing rapidly along the traffic-polished asphalte of the street, where the overhanging lamps were reflected as from a dark river. That 'bus carried off all that mattered in life to Henry Coggin—carried her off to irretrievable disaster, for he had failed to speak.

His first black depression, as he turned homewards along Oxford Street, was suddenly irradiated. It was he, Henry Coggin, the writer of those letters, whom she loved—loved him as he loved her, all unaware that it was he ! For a few minutes, he exulted. Then the ironic actuality returned in full force. She loved him, identifying him with Denis Trevor. Confession would destroy her faith in both, in everything. He felt this obscurely, incapable of analysis, visualising only a face of bitter scorn from which he shrank.

"Hell!" he said to himself, and all Oxford Street was in fact hell for him, a ghost-peopled corridor in an Inferno that not even Dante had imagined.

Denis came in at the last possible moment, as was his wont.

"Well," he asked, with a malicious smile, "did you tell her?"

"No," said Henry, sullenly, "I didn't."

"I didn't think you would," sneered Denis, coolly contemptuous.

Henry looked up.

"Denis," he said. "I warn you—you play straight with that girl!"

Denis shrugged his shoulders and undressed.

More than a week passed. Denis maintained an obstinate silence in which his smile was significant. Henry watched him, despair in his soul, harassing his brains night and day for some scheme which should save his goddess from sacrilege without breaking her heart. Perhaps, after all, her influence would redeem Denis, render him a good husband. He tried to believe this. But he was desperately lonely, the sight of the other young fellows reading their correspondence a torture to him. Denis tossed across no more letters to Henry Coggin.

The high gods perhaps looked down with a quickening of interest on that plain-featured young man who sold cravats and hosiery in the palatial magnificence of Messrs. Comwrights' emporium. To their sublimity, the pettiness of his occupation was a matter of as little moment as the press-heralded enterprises of statesmen, millionaires and kings. In the immensity of the Cosmos the whole earth is but as a grain of dust. They looked to the human soul, as temporarily in this environment as the king's in his—and each environment fashioned for its testing. Henry Coggin's soul, to him the only ultimate reality and haply more important than he himself was aware of, was now in the fires of trial. The supreme test of his metal, which perhaps comes in one form or another to every human being once in his life, was at hand. And to the high gods, the hero, whether he be general or private soldier, king or shop-assistant, is the same.

Denis had gone out. Henry could imagine in whose company. And Henry sat in the recreation-room of that dull Georgian house, whiling away the tedium of an evening in which he could create no interest for himself. Across the room half-a-dozen of his fellow-employees were chattering and laughing together. A chance-heard word from the group made him look up. What was that? They turned round upon him. Hadn't he heard? Denis Trevor had got hold of a rich girl. He was going to marry her and start in business for himself—and Kitty Fisher was going with him. She was 'the limit', Kitty! . . . *Kitty?* . . . Were they sure? They laughed, knowingly. They were certain. Kitty had already handed in her notice.

Henry gasped. He saw into Denis's cynical mind with a flash of preter-actue perception. Denis and Kitty—he had no illusions as to their past and probable future relations—were conspiring to make a fool of that girl who was his scarcely human ideal. And when they had built up their business with her money. . . . He imagined her cast-off, deceived, broken-hearted. He fled from the room, unable to endure the horror of the jesting comments of those light-minded cads.

He found himself in the street, his brain on fire. This must be stopped—stopped at all costs. How? Tell her the whole story? He was only too conscious of the futility of such an attempt. Denis had had long enough to exercise his fascination. She would not believe him—would think him mad. He explored every possibility, found them hopeless. Denis's handsome, confidently-smiling face was at the end of each. Denis! There was only one way. He must (his heart almost stopped), he must kill Denis! Instinctively he fingered the large jack-knife, a souvenir of the war, in his pocket.

And then he was suddenly afraid—in a cold sweat of terror. To kill Denis meant that he, he Henry Coggin, would be hanged. A cinematograph-film of an execution that he had seen came up in a vivid mental picture—the agony of the trial, the bleak solitude of the condemned cell—waiting for the moment—the horror of that last walk, pinioned, between stone walls, to the scaffold. His whole

being revolted in sickened panic. Anything but that! And then he thought of the girl, his goddess, the one glowing vision of his life, threatened, all unconscious, with squalid misery. He remembered his romantic aspirations to lay down his life for her. Was any sacrifice too great? And it was his fault. He summoned up all his courage, willed, sick at the heart of him, his knees weak, this desperate solution. Perhaps he would go to hell, he thought —plumbing the hereafter with a simple-minded theology. Even hell—for her! He opened the jack-knife, looked at it curiously, fingered it, slipped it back still open into his jacket pocket. He offered up all that he knew of his immortal soul for her. There are various kinds of heroes.

And then, suddenly, he saw them coming, arm in arm under a distant street-lamp. The thoroughfare was deserted. Sweat broke out all over him. He felt himself shaking. He approached them. They were close. Now! He went up to Denis.

"I want a word with you, Denis!" his voice was not his own.

"What's the matter?" Denis stopped. The girl drifted on a few yards.

"Is it true that you're going to take Kitty with you in your business?"

Denis glared at him.

"Mind your own affairs!"

"It's true then?"

"What's that to you?"

"Blackguard!" Henry Coggin felt himself leap as though propelled by a spring within him, felt the crash of his right hand in automatic violent contact with Denis's chest, saw Denis crumple under him and sink, with a hideous gurgle, to the pavement. He found himself with the open knife still in his hand, bewildered by the suddenness of it.

And then the girl sprang at him.

"Murderer!" she cried. "Police! Police! Help!" She held him in a grip he would not have believed possible, denounced him to the wide world.

"All right," he said, trembling. "I'll wait for them. Don't worry."

The next was a dream to him, the quick patter of running feet, the suddenly encircling crowd, the policeman.

It was only in the barely-furnished office of the police-station that he came fully to himself. The inspector, at his high desk, noted down, business-like, the details reported to him by the two burly constables. The girl sat on a bench by a deal table, her face on her arm, sobbing as though her heart would break. He, his wrists hand-cuffed, stood looking at her. He did not regret. Awful as was this moment, he had saved her from worse.

She looked up at him with a tear-stained face.

"Why—why did you do it?" she asked.

He seized the privilege that he had earned.

"Because I loved you," he said simply.

"Loved me!" she mocked him. "I hate you! You have killed the one man in the world that I could love——," she gulped; "there was only one Denis——"

"Good job," growled Henry sullenly, between his teeth.

"Silence!" commanded the inspector.

"But you haven't killed him!" Her voice was tremulous with emotion, her breast panting, her eyes blazing with a triumph snatched even yet. "I have him still . . . for all my life . . . all the best of him that he wrote to me . . . the real man that I loved . . . nothing can take that away from me . . . he'll live with me still," she choked, "—I can still read him . . . every day . . ." her head went down again into her hands, " . . . my one beloved!"

He stared at her, made a motion as though to speak, and then was silent. There was a strange smile upon his face as, obeying the push of the policeman, he went to his cell, that last phrase ringing in his ears.

. . . . . .

The more *blasé* of the high gods, it may be presumed, created a stir of annoyance as they rose from their seats, disdaining to wait for a final curtain already obvious. Their sophisticated sense of irony was satisfied.

"CAPRICE VENITIEN"

"CAPRICE VENITIEN"

It was September, the season when dawn, in a golden emergence from the eastward over the glassy waters of the grey-white lagoons, discovers Venice night-wrapped in autumnal mist, the distinctive silhouette of the Campaniles and the dome of Santa Maria della Salute cloudlike in the unillumined Occident, the city whence they spring vague and unsubstantial across the horizon. Later, as the sun rises into a sky ever more and more crystal-blue, those mist-veils vanish like her dreams, the rose-pink and white of the arcaded front of the Doge's Palace is reflected in a suffusion of delicate warmth over the waveless flood that stretches softly blue to the bright-red Campanile of San Giorgio Maggiore, and the Grand Canal opens its vista of water-lapped palaces, their balconies festooned with flowers, into the heart of this city of romance that has awakened once more to the mirroring of her eternal beauty, superbly colourful, if dilapidated, in the sunshine.

It is the season also of warm, still evenings that darken into nights where that ravaged beauty of the day-time passes into an exquisite and ghostly beauty that is like a phantasmal evocation of the magnificent past. The great mooring-stakes tapering to their base stand up like spectres in the gloom above the dark waters murmuring and caressing at the half-submerged steps of the Renaissance palaces as though in a consolatory interchange of antique secrets. The broad, winding waterway of the Grand Canal is a river of mystery where the green and red lights of the modern steamboats flit swiftly past each other in silence, and the music from the illuminated palaces here and there seems an uncanny persistence of ancient revelries.

In the dark side-canals, where the overhanging lamps of

wrought-iron do no more than indicate the sudden corners, the black gondolas glide stealthily through the shadows unpenetrated by the little light upon their bows, as though conveying breathless lovers to assignations first whispered under a mask. Across the still waters, from a glowing point of illumination in the dark of the end of the Grand Canal, comes the plaintive harmony of distance-softened voices that sing of '*Amore*' to the faint twang of far-away guitars, perpetuating the serenade that has been heard on every such night throughout the centuries.

Towards this music a gondola slid noiselessly from under the shadow of Santa Maria della Salute, the water rippling afresh from its flanks at each long propulsive sweep of the gondolier high upon its stern. As in most of the other gondolas that moved almost indistinguishable in the gloom, a man and woman sat side by side in its sunken seat. The serenaders were now close ahead of them, singing under a canopy hung with Chinese lanterns in a boat that was stationary on the lagoon.

To the left, the radiance from the Piazzetta, silhouetting its pair of columns, spread itself over the smooth waters of the Basin of San Marco. It illumined the faces of the man and woman in the gondola. Both were bareheaded. Both were young. He was a blond, Scandinavian type of strongly characterised physiognomy. She was beautiful, with that beauty which hushes a man as in the presence of something supernatural. The light from the Piazzetta glinted on hair that was reddish-gold. Silently they approached the lantern-hung boat around which a mass of motionless black gondolas was clustered. The words of a traditional serenade came clearly on the naïvely simple melody fortified by the guitars. The slight splash of the gondolier's oar ceased as the long, light craft slid up to join the listeners.

" *Se lassarè passar*
La bella e fresca età,
Un zorno i ve dirà
Vechia maura ;
E bramarè, ma invan,
Quel che ghavevi in man
Co avè lassà scampar
La congiontura."

The woman of the reddish-golden hair sighed, her hand slid down to the hand of her companion, touched it as if involuntarily. The man's hand responded, closed over hers which made no motion to escape. She sighed again, sighed in a relaxed abandonment to the soft night, to the delicate buoyancy of their craft which danced on the water-swirl of a movement among the other gondolas. She spoke in English, in a low voice, rich and deep.

" You understand ? "

He turned to divine rather than see the wistful smile on her shadowed face.

"Yes, Contessa—at least, the drift of it. It is dialect ? "

" The words are dialect," she answered, " but their meaning is universal—your Shakespeare sang the same song : ' Youth's a stuff will not endure '—you remember ? " The smile was illumined in the glow from the Chinese lanterns as the gondola swung towards the now silent singers. " The eternal warning to seize the occasion while we may ! It is a song sung to us in every language—and we never listen until it is an irony to us." Her English was that perfect English of the Italian aristocracy, piquant with only the faintest suggestion of a foreign accent.

He reaffirmed his sentimental pressure on her hand.

"For you, Contessa," he said, with a simple earnestness, "such thoughts should be still far distant."

Her eyes turned away from his.

" Ah ! " she murmured, and was silent.

A woman stood up in the boat under the Chinese lanterns and commenced another song, the refrain of which was taken up in chorus by the serenaders. Others followed, and, while some of the attracted gondolas stole silently away, newcomers slid up one after the other out of the night to take their places. The central theme of all these naïvely-rendered songs was the same, whether they were traditional folk-songs or the latest popular street-ballads—it was Love, the romance of man and woman under the stars affirming their necessity to each other, Love that was harshly tragic, Love that was a matter for broad comedy, Love that is the guerdon of the flitting opportunity.

The Contessa shivered, drew her rich evening cloak closer across her bare shoulders.

" Let us go further," she said. " Into the lagoon." She turned to the gondolier. " Beyond San Giorgio ! " she ordered.

The gondola backed out of the throng, moved forward over the dark water like a light and living thing.

The pair of them sat in silence, while the illumination of the Piazetta receded behind them. They passed under the tenebrous bulk of anchored ships, passed beyond the twinkling lights of the San Giorgio barracks to their right, passed out into the dark immensity of the lagoon, the water lapping and gurgling under the bottom of their skimming craft, the only definite sound that of the gondolier's oar as it jerked in its support.

It was he who spoke first, breaking a silence where their last word seemed infinitely remote. He seemed to wake from a dream.

" Where are the others ? "

The bare shoulders under the evening cloak lifted in careless indifference.

" Still listening to the serenade—or gone home," she replied. " They are used to my caprices."

He took up the word, suddenly uneasy.

" Caprice ?—Is this—*caprice,* Contessa ? "

She did not answer. The gondolier behind them, expecting from moment to moment the order to return, relaxed his stroke to the point that, now unheard, he slipped out of memory, together with the lights of Venice out of vision at their backs. The unruffled surface of the sleeping water of the lagoon reflected the stars of a blue night without a horizon, so still that they in the gondola seemed to drift in interstellar space, contact lost with what had been the realities of the mundane turmoil for which they had garbed themselves in evening dress. They were utterly alone together, an elemental sympathy electric between them, intimate confidences of the soul trembling on the verge of the utterance fostered by such a solitude. But still no word came from her. Only the hand warm in his moved slightly.

He spoke again, his voice sombre with emotion.

" Contessa, are you so much the incarnation of Venice that a Northerner may not know the secrets of your silence ? "

The beautiful face just visible in the starlight turned large eyes upon him. She sighed, for all response.

" You are unhappy ? " His question probed her.

She shook her head, shrugged her shoulders in contradiction.

" Perhaps."

" You were so brilliantly gay an hour ago, when we all came out of your Palazzo to the gondolas ! "

Her shoulders lifted.

" When one commits suicide, one has the right to do it cheerfully."

" Suicide ? " His tone was eloquent of his bewilderment.

She smiled.

" Social suicide, *amico mio.* I committed it to-night on the water-steps of my Palazzo."

" Contessa, I do not understand."

She looked into the depths of the blue night, spoke suddenly with an explicitness that was almost harsh.

" Yesterday one of the noblest and proudest gentlemen in Italy honoured the widow of the Count Forsini with the offer of his hand. Half Venice was whispering it, speculating on my Yes or No. To-night I left that noble gentleman ignored on the water-steps of my Palazzo as I passed into this gondola alone with you—you whom I did not know a week ago, whom no one knows." She smiled again at him. " In my world, Signor Michael Aylward, I have committed the unforgivable.

He seized her hand in both of his, bent over her.

" Contessa," he said in a strange voice, " you did that because—because——? " he stopped, not trusting himself to dare the reason.

Her eyes looked up to his, turned away.

" I think we called it caprice," she said, her voice trembling.

There was again a silence wherein the gondola slid onward in the night with a gentle sough of water at her flanks.

She looked round to see him staring straight in front of him, his powerfully masculine face set in an indecipherable expression.

" I could almost wish that it were so," he said hoarsely, " —that you were a woman whose caprices I could play with—that you were not—— " he checked himself.

"Not what, Signor Aylward ? " her voice came in an almost inaudible murmur.

" Not that one divine woman whom I never expected to meet in all my life—that one woman who is mysteriously sacred ! " he broke out. He hesitated a moment. " Contessa, I used to laugh at the poets—until I met you. I thought Love was an illusion which mankind invoked to justify its enjoyments." Once again he hesitated, with the shyness of the Northerner at expressing his intimate, deeper thoughts. " Contessa, do you realise how wonderful you are ? To me, an hour ago, you were Venice itself, its very incarnation, in all its unique beauty, its mystery, its fascination. And now, now that we have left Venice behind us, you are more than that—you seem to me a part of this blue night with its myriad stars in unimaginable immensity ; close to you, looking into your eyes, I look into its unfathomable meaning, the meaning of life itself.

" Does the ordered universe know caprice ? Contessa, it is more than caprice which keeps you by me, which surges through me at the touch of you and yet fills me with an awe that almost stills the words upon my lips. I do not know why we have come together, but for you and me to talk of caprice is sacrilege. It is the highest in us that meets." He looked at her ; she was silent, brooding like the night itself, her thoughts beyond his divination. " Contessa," he said again, his voice deep and earnest, " is this Love ? Have you in your life experienced that Love the poets write of ? "

Her eyes came round to him. Her voice, as she spoke, quivered like her lips.

" *Amico Michael,*" she said, " I had looked for it so long that I had given up the search and . . ." she hesitated, " —and almost bound myself again without it."

" You would contract a marriage without love," he risked an evident audacity, " —but love without marriage ? "

She moved her shoulders, reaffirmed the carriage of her head.

" I am too proud," she said simply.

" In any circumstances ? "

She looked at him.

" I am a Forsini who married a Forsini. My fathers look down at me from my walls. One of them let himself be flayed alive by the Turks rather than surrender his honour."

He sighed, sat motionless, staring at the stars that powdered the blue night around them. It was she who broke the silence.

" What do you read in those stars, *amico mio ?* " she asked gently, as though in palliation of her own severity.

" A smile of ineffable irony," he replied.

" I do not understand ? "

He spoke between his teeth.

" Contessa, there was once a prince whose soul was weary. He was tired of speaking to masks that smiled even if they were angry, to men who left their manhood outside his palace and bowed at his approach so that he could not see their eyes, to women whose glances sought never the man but only the Prince."

He paused. The woman at his side made a slight movement but remained silent. He went on.

" He felt that at least once in his life he must test his manhood in the common world of men. So, with the only man he could safely call his friend, he came to Paris, and left that friend there with his identity. He came to Venice with a letter of introduction that recommended his friend's name to the Count Castoldi."

" His friend's name ! " There was reproach in the deep murmur of her voice.

" We are both called Michael," he said in lame self-extenuation. " Contessa—can you forgive me ? " He interrogated her silence. " No . . . perhaps it is better that you should not."

He felt her tremble at his side.

"Why?" she asked, almost inaudibly.

He took a deep breath ere he replied.

"Contessa, I have a cousin who will one day be a queen. I am destined to be her husband. Where I love I may not marry."

They drifted on in the silence of the vast night which seemed to hold that last phrase indefinitely audible.

The Contessa spoke at last, in a voice that tried for the commonplace.

"Then you are not English?"

He shook his head.

"I was educated in England."

She looked at him.

"May I not know?"

He bent towards her, whispered a word.

"Oh!" she said, and was again silent.

He felt for the hand which had escaped his; found it.

"You cannot forgive?" he said, his face so close to hers that he could see the humidity of her eyes wide-open to the night.

She brought herself to speak.

"Prince——"

He made a gesture, bent over her.

"No," he said. "Never from you. To you I am just a man, with the heart of a man."

She shivered and her eyes closed swooningly under his gaze. He felt a convulsive grip on his hand.

"And to you," she murmured as though from out of a dream, "I am just a woman, with the heart of a woman."

His lips went down to her instinctively, met her mouth in a long, long kiss that seemed impossible of severance. The gondola slid past a little glow of light in the blue night. It was the lamp before a Madonna in a tiny shrine affixed to a lonely stake in the shallow waters of the lagoon. She freed herself from him in a sudden revolt.

"No, no!" she gasped, pushing him away. "It is madness!" She turned to the gondolier, cried an order. "Beppo! *Al Palazzo!*"

The gondola awakened from its drifting slumber, swung round in a swirl of water, leaped forward as though hurrying

from a disturbing dream, the indented halberd on its prow swinging silhouetted across the far-off radiance of Venice in the distance.

He bent close to her again. She repelled him with a quiet strength, her beautiful face a mystery he could not penetrate.

" No, no ! " she said, entreaty mingled with the denial in her low, deep voice. " It was madness ! Forget it ! "

" Never ! " he said. " That is impossible ! I can never forget."

She put up her hand, imploring silence. The gondola sped onward under the vigorous strokes of the rower eager to get home. Ahead of them, Venice was an array of lights repeated, trembling, in the water, the profile of the city vague against the dark blue sky where the stars ceased. Intuitively, he sensed her yearning towards it as towards safety. With every moment of silence he felt her more and more inaccessible. She withdrew herself into her dignity, brooded, perhaps, over its hurt. An awe of her as for a goddess, Minerva or Diana, invaded him, made him marvel that he had dared so far. Yet he could not utterly renounce.

" Aurelia ! " he murmured. " I ask no weakness of you. But just once—speak my name ! "

She looked at him with eyes that sent a thrill through him.

" Michael ! " she said, with a tenderness that escaped in spite of herself. " Michael !—You would not make me hate myself ! "

" Can you forgive ? " he asked.

" Forgive what ? " The question came with a smile of melancholy.

" I think of a noble gentleman abandoned on your palace-steps," he whispered, " —and my responsibility."

She made a gesture that pushed the memory from her.

" That is finished," she said.

" And the future ? "

" Heaven knows ! " Remorse smote him at her voice.

There was again a silence. San Giorgio Maggiore loomed up on their left.

" To-morrow I leave Venice," he said suddenly.

She turned to him.

" To go where ? "

" Back to my prison. I have had my taste of life—just one moment ! Perhaps I shall be content now. Without a soul I can live among those puppets—they want only an image to bow to. I leave my soul on our palazzo-steps where we part."

She made no answer. The gondola went swiftly on, passed the Dogana with its surmounting Fortune, an ironic memento of deceived ambitions, dark against the sky, entered the Grand Canal.

He spoke again.

" You can lend me your gondola to return to my hotel ? "

Again she did not answer. The gondola slid past the dark façades of ancient palaces. The canal was deserted. The silent city slept. A deep-toned bell struck two solemn, booming notes.

The gondola slipped through a row of tall *pali* inclining their heavy heads over the water, swerved towards the half-submerged steps of a Renaissance *palazzo*. The doorway of its florid portal was just ajar in a long slit of light. The gondola brought its flank up against the steps, stopped.

He sprang out, reached to assist her as she followed him. She stood erect, her cloak around her, her hair an aureole in the shaft of light from the half-open door, queenly on this threshold of her ancestors. He held out his hand, unable to articulate the word of farewell that choked in his throat. She looked into his eyes, her face strange—turned to the gondolier.

" You can go, Beppo. We need you no more to-night."

. . . . . .

It was October. The setting sun poured a flood of orange-golden light through the balconied windows of the long and narrow salon, falling in a rectangular pattern of brightness on a wall where hung the armour and portraits of those dead and gone Venetian patricians whose bijou *palazzo* was now leased to Signor Michael Aylward. From

the narrow side-canal in a ravine of tall buildings which turned at an angle beneath that balcony came the melancholy warning shouts of gondoliers—*a-òel—a-òel !* The young man standing near the sculptured fireplace forgot them in the first delicately harmonised chords from the grand piano where sat the woman on whom his gaze was focussed. She commenced to sing in a soft, rich contralto voice whose expression in it controlled restraint seemed addressed only to her own emotions, her long, thin fingers light upon the keyboard in an accompaniment of fragile grace that recalled the eighteenth century spinet for which it was written.

" Voi mi poneste in gioia
Tanta soavi parolette accorte,
Che'l viver non m'annoia
Che è pur si duro e forte,
Nè mi dispiace morte, pur ch'io muoia
Per voi, morte gradita ;
Ond'io spero aver vita
Mille, e mille anni poi
Ch'io sar ò morta, s'io morrò per voi."

Her voice ended on a note that was swallowed in a sob. He came across to her, looked down into the swimming eyes that turned up to him.

" Tears ? " he said gently.

She made a gesture that denied their importance.

" It is just an old song," she smiled at him, bravely, her beautiful eyes wet. Her slender figure rose to him from the piano.

He put both hands upon her arms, looked into her face.

" No," he said, perturbed in sympathy. " It is more than that, Aurelia. There were tears in your eyes when you came in. Tell me ! "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" It is nothing, *amico mio,*" She smiled again. " The love of my Michael is worth more than the recognition of the greatest of great ladies."

His brow darkened.

" Who has dared . . . ? " he commenced angrily.

She kissed him with a sudden summoning-up of all the radiance of her smile.

"It is nothing, *caro*. Perhaps she did not see me. It was the Principessa. As our gondolas passed, she looked in the other direction—that is all. I am so stupidly sensitive!"

The frown did not leave his brow.

"This is intolerable!" he said. He turned and scowled at the window as though in defiance of the outside world. Then he enfolded her in his arms, looked down into her face. "Aurelia! my loved one!—I cannot subject you to this!—you, the noblest, the purest of women! That they should dare to slight you!" She felt his fists clench behind her back.

She looked up to him, clung to him.

"I am happy Michael!—happy when I come to you!—happy when I am alone even and I think of you!—my own man of all the world!"

"I am that to you, Aurelia? Just a man you love for himself alone?" She smiled at the anxious, boyish vanity that asked the question, kissed him in gratitude for it.

"Just as a man, Michael!" she assured him, fond sincerity in her deep, emotional voice, her eyes on his. "And when you have gone away from me and are a prince once more, it will be just as a man that I shall think of you in my solitude."

He protested, vehemently.

"I cannot leave you, Aurelia! I will not leave you!—Each day of our love together makes it more impossible.—Oh, day and night I have been brooding over it, and I have made up my mind. I have the rights of a common human being as well as other men. There is no life for me without you. Nothing shall separate us—nothing!"

She shook her head at him, wisely, pathetically.

"It is inevitable, *Michael mio*, some day. And I look into the face of every dawn and ask whether it is to-day, the day that shall tear us apart."

"Have we not the right to love as well as the beggar in the street?" he burst out, angry not with her but with the inexorable truth he would not admit.

She shook her head again,

"Neither you nor I, *caro*. You are of a race of kings —and I am a Forsini." She glanced around her at the room hung with souvenirs of an antique chivalry. "An ancestor of mine built this very palazzo for his mistress. Venice summoned him away from her even as she lay dying. He went—for he was a Forsini and his arms bore his creed—'*The highest, cost what it will.*' She sighed. "We are a tragic race, we Forsinis."

He drew her to him in a strong embrace that was a wild reaction against the suggested severance.

"No!" he cried. She thrilled at the masculine emphasis of his voice. "Do not torture yourself, my beloved! That day is yet far distant. When it arrives we will deal with it." A bowl of late red roses stood on the piano. He took one of them, put it in her bosom, bent and kissed it. "I would rather have that rose upon your heart than a crown upon my head."

"*Caro carissimo!*" she murmured, her eyes filling with tears. "It is there for you alone." She kissed him on his brow, her hands holding his head, looked deeply into his eyes, kissed him again.

"Now let us take the gondola," he said, with a sudden determined cheerfulness, "and go into the lagoon—see Venice swimming in the gold of the sunset. It is not too late, I think." He went to the window for a glance at the sky, looked from it down to the narrow side-canal below the balcony.

She turned towards him at a sharp exclamation, saw him staring into the canal.

"What is it?" she asked, approaching him, catching alarm from his tone.

"—Arnevelt!" he said, in startled surprise. "Arnevelt!" He glanced round at her in a sudden agitation. "What does he want? How did they find me?"

"Arnevelt?" she queried.

"Baron Arnevelt," he elucidated grimly, watching the gondola below. "One whom the King delights to honour —and employ on state-missions of extreme delicacy." The gondola swerved into the water-steps. He turned to her, his face furious. "I will not see him!"

She met his eyes.

"Michael!" she said quietly. "You must!"

His Italian man-servant entered, holding out a card.

"To see the Signor," he announced.

There was a moment's silence as the young man turned the card over in his fingers. She watched him with eyes whose expression he did not see, stimulated his decision.

"I will go into the next room," she said, and went to the curtain-hung door beyond the fireplace.

He gazed after her, accepted the inevitable.

"Show him in," he ordered curtly.

The permission was scarcely necessary, for the envoy had not risked refusal. As she drew straight the hangings behind her, she had a glimpse of a tall, elderly man, with the air of a Prussian officer of the old school, who bowed stiffly but with deep respect in the doorway of the staircase.

She passed on into the little room, sank trembling into a chair.

Between her and the salon was only the curtain. She could not help but hear those voices that commenced. She heard *his*, curt and haughtily interrogative—heard the respectful reply that was nevertheless unflinchingly firm. They spoke in a language that sounded like German, but was not. She did not understand it, was baffled by the words that passed too quickly for her to ponder over them for a guess at their meaning. But the tones in which they were uttered were eloquent. *He* spoke angrily, resentful of this outrage upon his privacy. The other, in a dignified restraint, was remonstrative and explanatory. He explained, evidently, at length—became appealing, implored, expostulated, implored again. There was no mistaking the emphatic negatives which answered him. The argument went back and forth interminably, increased in vehemence, came almost to the point of altercation, mounted to a climax that was held in the suspense of a sudden silence. She heard *his* footsteps upon the polished floor, quick and decisive in their approach.

The curtain was jerked aside. He stood in the aperture, beckoned to her, took her by the hand as she came to him, led her into the salon. He turned to the envoy.

" Baron Arnevelt," he said. " We will talk in English which we can all understand. You ask me for my reasons. This is the reason ! " He indicated the Contessa. She stood, superbly beautiful, in the unshakable dignity of a woman of ancient race. The old aristocrat recognised his kind in the instant that he bowed, stiffly courteous. The Prince went on. " I am about to make this lady my wife. You can go back and tell them I renounce—everything ! You can tell them that you have seen her," he shrugged his shoulders in contempt of alien opinion, " if that will help."

" But——" stammered the envoy. " Your Royal Highness—— "

" I am no longer a Royal Highness. I renounce. Do you understand ? I am free to do what I will—free as other men are free."

The old man threw up his hands in a gesture of desperation. She interposed quietly.

" May I not know the reason of this visit ? "

The old man turned to her eagerly, as to a last hope.

" Madame, I come from our Chancellor of State. The King is desperately ill. There is revolution in the air. The successor to the throne is a woman. There is a long-standing arrangement—it must be fulfilled. We need a man if the State is to be saved." His gesture was an appeal to both of them.

The young man stood frowningly obdurate. She turned to him, spoke in tones that were grave almost to solemnity.

" Prince, you hear ? They need a *man*."

His answer was vehemently emphatic.

" Aurelia ! There is no trick of fate, no temptation however plausible, that can take me from you. I write out my renunciation to-night. I am no longer a Prince. I am what I always have been in this house—and I never was a Prince to you."

She laughed suddenly, such a laugh as he had never heard from her, a startling, silvery laugh of irrepressible mockery. Both men stared at her in amazement.

" What absurdity ! " she said.

He gasped, incredulous of his ears.

" Aurelia ! "

She smiled at him as from a lofty compassion.

" My Prince, I am sorry to be cruel—but there is no illusion that must not one day fall to pieces."

" Illusion ? " He stared at her as though doubtful of his sanity. Then he turned to the old man, spoke in a tone of royal command. " Arnevelt ! Be good enough to leave us."

She also turned to the envoy as, with his stiff bow, he obeyed.

" Remain in the house, Signor. Your master will need you."

He looked towards the door that closed upon the old man's exit, caught her in his arms.

" Aurelia ! You cannot mean it !—You are playing with me ! Sacrificing yourself because you think it right ?—— Aurelia ! Tell me that you are playing with me ! "

She freed herself, with dignity.

" My Prince, forgive me. I have been playing with you, —but it would be wrong to play longer. I cannot sacrifice your life to a caprice that has become dangerous even to myself."

" Caprice ? " he echoed. " I do not understand."

" Can you not understand the caprice of a woman who wished to be romantically loved by a Prince ? "

He looked at her, took a long, slow breath of realisation.

" Then you knew—from the beginning ? "

She smiled.

" Do you think Castoldi did not guess ? Do you think there are no photographs of you ? "

He was silent for a moment, bringing himself to the implications of her words.

" So," he said slowly, " it was *not* the man you loved— it was the Prince ? "

She nodded her head in cruel assent.

" It was the Prince.— A romantic adventure."

His eyes probed hers, in an agony of doubt.

" Aurelia ! How far can I believe you ? "

" You can believe me—now ! " she said unflinchingly.

" Now ?—Then the other—all the other—was illusion ?

Aurelia, I cannot believe it ! You loved me—if I am sure of anything, I am sure of that ! "

She shook her head.

" My friend, have you yet to learn that a woman can act any part she wills ? "

" Then you did not . . . ? " The words broke from him in an agonised cry.

" I gratified a caprice—only too thoroughly. Forgive me ! " she said, with an imploring little gesture to disarm the wrath it recognised as just.

He turned from her, pressed his hand upon his eyes. She contemplated him, pity and more than pity in her face. He swung back upon her.

" But even if——" his voice checked, reaffirmed itself with difficulty. " Even if you did not love me . . . you have compromised yourself . . . your good name . . . that woman, only this afternoon . . ." he became inarticulate, looked at her, finished in a despairing appeal. " Aurelia, I cannot believe it ! This is a comedy you are playing . . . a comedy that breaks my heart ! . . . Aurelia ! I forget all you have said. Let me see you look at me as you looked an hour ago. . . . I know you too well. I recognise the sublime nobility of your love for me. . . . Aurelia ! Do not deny that love ! Let this end . . . and be my wife ! "

She looked at him steadily.

" The morganatic wife of a Prince ? " She gestured its intolerability. " No, my Prince, I do not care for such an equivocal position."

" But your position now ! "

She shrugged her shoulders, smiled with careless indifference.

" I go to Rome for the season. People will whisper —as they whisper about every other woman. Next year it will be forgotten."

" But your friends . . . the friends you care for ? Aurelia ! I cannot bear to think of you humiliated ! "

She smiled at him, unperturbed.

" Prince, do you remember what I said that night on the lagoon ? . . . My friends are used to my caprices."

He looked at her, searching her to the soul.

" It was . . . mere caprice ? " he said slowly, in a tone that was solemn in its significant finality.

She met his eyes.

" Mere caprice . . . like its predecessors," she answered, with not less finality.

They looked at each other in a long silence. Then he strode suddenly to the door, opened it and called :

" Arnevelt ! "

The old man reappeared, bowed, glanced from one to the other in nervous apprehension.

The Prince scowled at him. " When does the express leave ? " he asked harshly.

The old man started with astonishment.

" In an hour, your Royal Highness," he replied, his face immediately a mask.

" Go and reserve a sleeper for me ! "

The Prince turned, took a step towards the woman rigid in the middle of the room, repressed an involuntary movement of his hand, bowed with a quick, stiff jerk of the upper part of his body. The old man, deferentially inclined, held the door open for him. He passed out, without a backward glance.

. . . . . .

In the darkness of that night a gondola slid out of the shadows of the Grand Canal. The radiance from the Piazetta fell upon a woman alone in its sunken seat. Ahead of her, from a boat hung with Chinese lanterns that glowed romantically under the sky of stars, came voices and guitars in the plaintive melody of a traditional serenade.

" E bramarè, ma invan,
Quel che ghavevi in man
Co avè lassà scampar
La congiontura."

The woman shivered, plucked her cloak close about her shoulders. She turned her head to the gondolier behind her.

" Do not stop, Beppo. Into the lagoon—*alla piccola Madonna.*"

The gondola skimmed, lightly swaying, over the still, dark water, leaving behind the serenade that died on the night.

At last a tiny point of light glimmered far ahead in the blue obscurity, grew larger, revealed itself as a hanging-lamp before a pigeon-cot-like shrine poised on a stake above the water.

The gondola slid up to it, stopped at a gesture from the woman's hand. She stood up, took a rose from her breast, placed it on the shrine.

"*Che capriccio!*" murmured the wondering gondolier, shaking his head over the most incomprehensive of mistresses. "*Che capriccio!*"

"S. O. S."

"S. O. S."

Captain Wilmott's first perception, as he opened his eyes to the morning light in his cabin on the lower bridge, was that the weather had worsened. Four twenty-four hours the *S.S. Susquehanna*, from Liverpool to New York with more ballast than cargo (as is usual with West-bound freighters across the North Atlantic), had been battling with a north-west February gale. The dizzying lift and drop, the wallowing roll with which she cork-screwed as she pitched, the thud and crash of green seas in violent impact with her structure, the vicious lash of flying scud upon her upper works; the intermittent vibrations of her propellor, soused for a moment or two of effective work, then checked abruptly in its first mad race clear of the water left far below her lifting stern; the howl and scream through the shrouds and stays of the wind that buffetted at the deck-houses as though with a mighty fist; all were eloquent of conditions outside. The ports were darkened with frozen spray. From somewhere adjacent came a whirring moan that intensified to a melancholy wail; the wireless was talking to some other ship, distant on this angry ocean.

Captain Wilmott slipped out of his bunk with a mighty yawn that testified to the hours he had spent upon the bridge last night. Then he got into his boots, jacket and top-coat—the only articles of which he had divested himself when he turned in. Shaving was a luxury he ignored as superfluous in a winter Atlantic gale. There were no women on board ship to criticise his appearance. He wen into the forward compartment of his double cabin which contained his desk and communicated with the chart-room on the starboard side.

With the mechanical performance of a routine action, he

glanced at the barometer—appallingly low—and tore off the date-slip from the block calendar hanging on the wall above his desk. The date half-registered itself in his mind in the instant that a vicious lurch of the ship jerked him heavily into the screwed-down revolving-chair. He sat there, staring at the calendar dumbly designating this day's particularity out of the innumerable days that had preceded and were to follow.

"Good God!" he muttered to himself. "February twenty-fourth! . . . And I hadn't remembered . . .!"

He sat there motionless in the chair, his hands gripped upon the arms, staring at the calendar, his powerfully-featured face set in the cast of a harsh emotion. The mouth under his moustache tightened itself to a hard line above the massive thrust of his jaw. He sat there staring at the calendar—but he no longer saw it.

He looked at a vision of himself on a February 24th three years back, striding up the fore-court path of a pretty little suburban villa. Behind him was the nostalgia of twelve months 'tramping' from port to port on distant seas. Awaiting him was—surely!—Gwen. He could almost hear her voice in the welcome he imagined. She had not been at the dock. There was no face at the window. His telegram, perhaps, had miscarried. He had turned the key in the front door—opened it to the silence of a house empty of any human being, to a heap of letters lying uncollected on the door-mat and dust thick on all the furniture.

He chilled at the memory of that devastating shock, and his face set yet more grimly, inexorably hard. He heard, as though repeated by a phonograph in his brain, his own words, uttered fiercely vindictive through his clenched teeth in the solitude of that deserted home, when, some days later, the last piece of furniture went out of it.

"I'll get on your track, Captain Buttevant—as sure as God made me!"

The threat had become part of him, the conscious purpose of his doggedly tenacious nature. All that was vital in him endorsed it afresh as he stared at those two black figures on the calendar.

It was for Captain Buttevant, that unknown, sinister personality he could imagine only from report, that his hatred glowed like a fire in dark depths of himself. He had never seen him, had not even found a photograph. It was one of his torments that sometimes he visualised him under one aspect, sometimes under another. The glib-tongued recitations of his wife's misconduct detailed by self-righteous neighbours had, curiously, made him only almost indignant on her behalf. It was for the man—the man who had played upon her inexperience, her girlish craving for affection—that he nursed an implacable resentment. His one object in life was to meet that Captain Buttevant who had profited by a prolonged detention in the port for repairs to steal away the girl-wife who had known but a few months of married life with her husband. From the day that Captain Buttevant's ship had sailed away, three months prior to his return, none had seen or heard of Mrs. Wilmott. The inference was irresistible.

With the seafarer's contempt for the slow and expensive intricacies of the law, he had sought no legal redress. Captain Wilmott, since the days he was mate of a leaky wind-jammer with a crew of polyglot toughs, had been a law unto himself. He had disconcerted the garrulous neighbours by an obstinate silence, sold up the furniture, and gone to sea again.

For three years there had been no spot of land that was home to him. But for three years each port he had entered had lured him with a possibility dispelled almost as soon as the mooring-ropes were thrown. Captain Buttevant was never there. He heard vague rumours of him occasionally, sea-gossip at third or fourth hand, which named him in connection with different ships and in differing trades. But the man himself remained ever unmet, an elusive phantom ever beyond the horizon-line of distant oceans.

A bell clanged harshly from somewhere beneath the captain's cabin, heard above the wild tumult of the gale. It was the summons to breakfast. Captain Wilmott rose, steadied himself with a grip on the chair as the floor mounted in a violent lurch under his feet, and scowled again at those

two heavy black numerals on the calendar which announced this ill-omened anniversary.

"I'll meet you yet, my friend!" he muttered to himself. "And when I do—God help you!"

Then, choosing his moment as the *Susquehanna* rolled her lee side under, he opened the heavy door that swung back behind him with a crash as she lifted again, and, propelled on the blast of wind that almost tore his hold from the rails, slid nimbly down the ladder to the slippery, ice-covered iron deck, dodged into the saloon under the bridge.

The place was muggy with steam-heat as he entered. At the long table transversely across the forward end, the first and second officers, the chief engineer and the senior Marconi operator were already at breakfast. He took his place at the head of the table, frowned at the menu the steward held for him.

Breakfast, despite the compartmented fiddles over the table, was an operation demanding deftness of hand that morning. The cups and plates slithered ceaselessly from side to side in the limited table-space allowed them as the ship pitched and lurched and wallowed in the waves that bore down at an angle upon her starboard bow. Every now and then all the crockery in the pantry went sliding to one startling, comprehensive smash that was surely final. The row of ports that looked out upon the forward deck were drenched at every instant with the green seas that shot up like a wall above the fo'c'sle and flew to a crashing impact with the superstructure. At frequent and irregular intervals, as her cascading bows lifted to the grey sky, she 'pounded,' a wave breaking under her fore-foot tossed high by the preceding roller, with a jarring shock that seemed to shake every bolt and rivet in the ship.

"Dirty morning, sir," observed Davidson, the first officer, in an effort to make a little conversation, "—and looks like getting worse."

"It does," agreed Captain Wilmott, succinctly. "What's she doing?"

"Not more than three-and-a-half."

"No use forcing her, sir, this weather," interjected

McGlashen, the chief engineer, prompt to justify economy in coal consumption.

"Not the least."

The tone of Captain Wilmott's curt response discouraged conversation, and they relapsed into the silence of men who have long exhausted every topic of real interest.

It was McGlashen who made the next attempt to relieve the morose taciturnity of the meal.,

"Heard from the missus this morning, Marconi?" he asked waggishly.

The senior Marconi operator had married at the end of the last voyage and notoriously had been spending a goodly fraction of his month's pay on an interchange of radiograms with his pining bride.

The young man flushed self-consciously.

"No," he said shortly. "I haven't."

"She'll have forgotten she ever married you by the time you get back," McGlashen teased him. The senior Marconi, as a Benedict, was of course fair game for witticism.

The young man frowned. His nerves were on edge this morning.

"I don't come away again!" he said, with the unexpected vehemence of a secret brooding that escapes control. "When I get back, I get a shore-job, if it's only to sweep a crossing!"

Captain Wilmott spoke suddenly from his end of the table.

"The man that goes to sea and leaves a wife behind him is a fool!" he said with harsh sententiousness.

There was a silence at this. All at that table were married men. It was the second officer, on his first trip in the *Susquehanna*, who broke the unpleasant constraint.

"That's just what I told my young brother, sir," he said. "He married last time he was home. He used to be on the *Ocean Star*—with Captain Buttevant——"

"With who?" The skipper turned sharply on him.

"With Captain Buttevant, sir. Do you know him?" The second mate was evidently disposed to get on a friendly footing with his new skipper.

Captain Wilmott ignored the question.

"The *Ocean Star*, you said? What trade's she on?"

There was something peculiar in his intonation which made the others glance up at the hard, expressionless mask of his face.

"I heard she's just been put on an Atlantic charter, sir," said the second mate, a little awkward under the steel-grey eyes that held him. "New York to Havre. My brother got a transfer. He didn't get on with Captain Buttevant. Did you say you knew him, sir?"

Once more the second mate received no answer. Instead, something in Captain Wilmott's face suggested that another question was on the point of utterance, but it did not issue from his lips. He turned away his head abruptly. The second mate was abashed into an uncomfortable silence at this lack of response. He shifted his eyes uneasily from the stern face that frowned at thoughts hidden from him. Not an easy man to know, this skipper, he thought to himself—a queer, hard devil, if ever there was one.

The melancholy wail of the wireless transmitter, set suddenly at work, made itself heard, faint down here in the saloon, through the crashing, thudding, howling tumult of the gale.

"There's your colleague using up power again!" said McGlashen to the senior Marconi in mock lament. "It's a good job he's not married—or we'd never make New York!"

"I wonder who he's talking to?" queried Davidson, finishing up his last mouthful of marmalade and rising to relieve the third officer on the navigating bridge. The senior Marconi followed him out of the saloon.

The second mate and McGlashen cocked their heads on one side, in that instinctive curiosity always evoked by communication with an unknown ship at sea, as though trying to decipher, from the moaning, eerie wail of the transmitter, the purport of the silent messages pulsing through the ether from the lofty aerials between the masts. Captain Wilmott sat lost in frowning thought, apparently oblivious to his surroundings. The wail ceased, recommenced after a moment or two of silence.

"He's got a lot to say," commented McGlashen, voicing the engineer's eternal grievance. "Having a little friendly chat, I suppose. Power costs nothing to those chaps!"

The junior Marconi entered the saloon, went up to the skipper. He held out a telegram-form.

"An S.O.S., sir!"

Captain Wilmott turned sharply to him, startled out of his reverie.

"What's that?" He snatched the message form from the boy's hand.

"An S.O.S., sir. The *Ocean Star*——"—

The lad stopped, in respect. The skipper was reading the message for himself.

"*S.O.S.—S.O.S.—Ocean Star approximate position lat.* 42·20 *long.* 47·50 *drifting lost propellor cargo loose making water immediate assistance required. S.O.S.*"

For a long minute the skipper sat staring at the piece of paper in his hand.

The talkative second officer, of course, could not refrain from a conversational word.

"The *Ocean Star,* sir? Funny we should have been talking about her! What's her trouble?"

Captain Wilmott rose to his feet without reply. Might as well talk to a statue, thought the second officer resentfully glancing at the baffling taciturnity of those rugged features. The skipper turned upon him.

"Work out our position as near as you can, Mr. Trent," he said, a curious harshness in his tone. "And bring it me in the chart-room at once."

Captain Wilmott went out of the saloon, clambered up against the buffets of the gale to the chart-room on the lower bridge.

He went straight to the blank chart of the mid-Atlantic, bent over it, ruler and dividers in his hand, plotting out the ship's track since the pencil-point that marked her position at yesterday's noon. Under that canopy of grey cloud, doubled underneath with gale-torn masses, no direct observation was possible. Her position had to be deduced from dead-reckoning.

He turned to see the second officer by his side.

"What do you make it?" he asked abruptly.

The second officer glanced at the figures he had worked out. "42·30—47·29, sir."

"You haven't allowed enough for leeway." Wilmott's tone had that same curious harshness. "I make it 42·25—47·30." He bent over the chart again.

"Near enough, sir," commented the second mate. He glanced at the *Ocean Star's* message, open on the chart. "She'll be rather more than twenty miles away, drifting south-east. We're only doing three-and-a-half—to catch her we shall have to get into a beam sea that'll roll the funnel out of us in this weather! And about five hours of it, at that! I doubt if it's possible—— "

Captain Wilmott straightened himself.

"I command this ship, Mr. Trent," he said icily. "That will do."

The second officer went out of the chart-room like a dog that has been kicked.

The captain stood in a sudden solitude, staring at that message lying on the chart, alone with a possibility that seemed automatically to fill his chest and clench his fists. A ghost of a grim smile came into his face as he bent down to prick on that map-space of empty sea the estimated position of the *Ocean Star*. The unpleasant smile vanished in the frown of a sudden doubt. The *Ocean Star* did not necessarily imply Buttevant himself. The doubt held him motionless for a moment. Then, with the brusque gesture of a man who cuts through uncertainty, Captain Wilmott forced open the chart-room door against the fury of the gale, and staggered, borne aft on the wind that nearly threw him on his face, to the wireless-room on the weather-side of the lower bridge deckhouses.

The junior operator stood up respectfully as he entered their narrow quarters. The senior sat at his desk, telephone-receivers clipped over his head, taking down an incoming message. He looked round to the skipper.

"She's in a bad way, sir. Making water fast—coming in the engine-room. She can't be very far away. We're getting her signals very strong—— "

Captain Wilmott ignored this information. The young junior operator, glancing at him, was startled at the expression of his skipper's face. He thought he read an utterly incomprehensible savage satisfaction in those harsh features,

The captain spoke curtly, a repressed excitement altering his voice.

" Just ask who's in command of her."

The operator tapped at his key. The message went out in a loud, uncanny crackle of diabolical blue sparks from the dynamo.

There was silence and a pause. Then the operator, interpreting signals inaudible to all but him, began to write quickly on the message-form in front of him. It was the answer. Captain Wilmott craned over the operator's shoulder.

" *—captain buttevant in command—*" The operator's hand went on writing, but for the moment Captain Wilmott saw only that first phrase. Half-anticipated though it was, its significance struck home to him with a thrilling shock. " . . . *Captain Buttevant in command.* . . ."

Captain Wilmott drew himself erect, his mouth tightening to a hard, cruel line, frowning in front of him as though he saw in his mind's eye that stretch of angry ocean where his enemy drifted helplessly in peril of his life. And it was to him that his enemy appealed! " By God, I'll meet you . . . ! " his own words re-echoed in him as though uttered anew by some malicious imp of remembrance. Meet ? He had only to pass by !

" What shall I tell him, sir ? " asked the operator, passing him the written message. " They seem pretty desperate—— "

Captain Wilmott glanced at the unread remainder.

" . . . *engine room almost flooded . . . cannot speak much longer . . . for god's sake come quickly.* . . ." Then his eye reverted to the commencement which distinguished this message from all others, . . . " *captain buttevant in command.* . . ."

Both operators looked at him, awaiting his decision. Outside, the gale in fury raved at the labouring ship; she shook, every plate of her, with a jarring vibration of rivets at strain, as she dived and wallowed in the terrific seas that leaped at her with a sickening thud and a vicious lash of spray high up against the wireless room. The walls quiveerd under the hammer-blows of the wind. In a

momentary lull, the funnel aft of them sizzled with salt water on its heated surface. This petty sound lasted but an instant, was engulfed in the familiar staggering crash of a green sea breaking over her bows, sweeping aft along her deck. It was a poor look-out for a helpless ship in such a sea as this.

Captain Wilmott turned to the operator.

"Are there any other ships about?"

"None within a hundred miles, sir."

Captain Wilmott nodded with a grim satisfaction. It was between him and the *Ocean Star* . . . Buttevant! None could intervene.

"What shall I tell him, sir?" the operator asked again, anxious for those desperate souls listening for his response.

Captain Wilmott took a deep breath. His eyes glittered.

"Tell him we're coming to him! . . . But—understand! —if he asks my name, don't give it!"

"Very good, sir." The operator accepted the prohibition without comment. He had been long enough with Captain Wilmott not to ask him for reasons.

Three years ago, Captain Wilmott's ship was another than the *Susquehanna*. It was at least odds on that Buttevant had never heard of his transfer, would not connect him with the ship coming to his rescue. The wireless operator could not look into his skipper's mind. The smile of grimly malicious enjoyment of an anticipated surprise, eluding the stern repression of that tight-lipped mouth, was an enigma to him.

The blue flames began to crackle once more over the wireless dynamo as Captain Wilmott went out again into the gale. The choking blast of wind almost tore him from the deck as he fought his way against it up to the navigating-bridge, where the first officer crouched behind the canvas 'dodger' and an oil-skinned seaman balanced himself at the wheel.

He went up to Davidson, curtly ordered the change of course.

The mate grinned cheerfully at him on his way to the steersman.

"Chance of salvage, sir?"

Captain Wilmott did not answer him. He stared over the top of the ' dodger ' at the wild waste of grey-green, foam-streaked sea that lifted itself into long, hurrying parallel ridges. The ship swung round to port, rolled sickeningly, scuppers-under, in the trough of a mighty wave, righted herself with a jerk that nearly threw him off his feet and threatened to shake the masts out of her. A voice shouted into his ear. It was the mate, once more beside him.

" Do you think she'll stand it, sir ? "

He glanced at the suddenly anxious face of his subordinate, scowled at him angrily.

" She's got to stand it ! "

He went to the navyphone—the high-powered telephone communicating with the engine-room, shouted into it.

" Ask Mr. McGlashen to come up here ! "

Before the chief engineer could arrive, the junior wireless operator clambered on to the bridge. He brought another message.

" . . . *engine room flooded . . . blowing off steam . . . last message . . . may founder any moment . . . come quick.* . . . "

No steam meant no power for the wireless dynamo. It was the last they would hear of the *Ocean Star* until they sighted her, if sight her they should. But she could still receive messages.

Captain Wilmott turned to the lad. " Tell them we're coming as fast as we can." A savage gust of wind tore the words from his mouth, but the boy caught his meaning, disappeared down the spray-drenched ladder.

A minute later the chief engineer stood beside him, bad-tempered, soused with a sea that had caught him on his way along the reeling deck.

He crouched low under the ' dodger ' to make his words heard.

" You can't keep her on this course, sir ! " he bawled. " You'll have the funnel out of her ! "

The skipper stared at him. It needed no words to make plain that look.

" I want you to get eight knots at least out of this

ship, Mr. McGlashen! More if you can!" He also had crouched under the 'dodger' and his words came curtly clear-cut, definitely emphatic.

"Eight knots!" The chief engineer almost screamed. "In this weather! D'you know what coal that'll cost?—To say nothing of the risk!"

He shrank appalled at the savage face that Captain Wilmott turned on him.

"You'll drive this ship at every ounce she's got in her, Mr. McGlashen! I don't care if you burn the last ton!—And I'm responsible for the risk!"

Mr. McGlashen half thought of venturing another expostulation, but the skipper turned his back on him. The chief engineer went cautiously down the ladder, cursing with every objurgatory epithet ever born in the hell-glare of a stokehold.

Five minutes later, the funnel of the *Susquehanna* was belching forth volumes of black, oily smoke that flattened down on the grey seas to leeward. The ship quivered like a living thing, her deck planks throbbing, her metal-work vibrating jarringly to the touch, under the thrust and race of her engines at full power. She rolled heavily, wildly, her masts swinging in an exaggerated arc across the sky, as the great moving ridges bore down upon her beam, surged under her in the very moment when it seemed she must be overwhelmed.

She held on her new course to the south-west like a drunken creature in a frenzy of futile haste. The yawing of her bows, swinging in wide divagations despite the hard-worked steersman at the wheel, the sickening, helpless, heavy lurch with which she rose upon the flank of one mighty roller and jerked over to slide down into the trough of the next, thwarted the high-pressure power that drove her, it seemed, almost to the point of extinction. Yet she held on, battened-down, doused with green water that boiled in a smother of white foam as it washed across her deck, dipping deep, scuppers-under, wallowing from beam to beam, her mast-shrouds, her funnel-stays, now sagging loose, now tautening almost to snapping-point as first one side then the other took the strain. Time after time, it was

a miracle that she righted herself as she lay over, paused all but overwhelmed in the momentarily windless valley of a gigantic sea. Time after time, it seemed as she swung back that it must be her last escape.

On her bridge, scowling over the top of the 'dodger,' his eyes frowning into the cloud-curtains drooping over that immensity of grey-green, foam-backed, hurrying, rearing rollers in an infinity of motion from horizon to horizon, stood the incarnation of the will that drove her forward through these perils. Globules of spray poised themselves on the moustache over the thin, hard line of his mouth. He stood immobile, hour after hour, steadying himself with one hand upon the rail, peering into the misty horizon which held a tiny point whereon three years of hate were focussed—or perhaps no longer held it.

The mate had renounced companionship, had retreated into the starboard bridge-shelter, whence he issued from time to time to stand by the steersman when an exceptionally mountainous sea surged down upon them. It was a ticklish job at the helm that morning. Every half-hour the steersman reached up a hand and clanged an increasing number of strokes upon the bell above his head. It was a little after eight o'clock when that S.O.S. had come in. Four bells had sounded, five bells—six bells. It was eleven o'clock. Allowing for her drift, the *Ocean Star* should be in the vicinity if she were still afloat. Captain Wilmott sent the mate aft to read the log. It registered nineteen since the last watch. The skipper smiled grimly. Old McGlashen had done the impossible. He had got—not a fantastic eight—but nearly seven knots out of her since he had his orders.,

But where was the *Ocean Star?* Since that last despairing appeal, no word had come from her. Her wireless was silenced. Fearful of overrunning her position, he moved to the engine-room telephone to order a slow-down. He stopped, arrested half-way. What was that tiny, pin-point of red light in the grey clouds far to windward? It sank, extinguished. An instant later another tiny spark took its place. He whipped out his binoculars, focussed them upon a minute, watery coruscation of red glow just visible

above the murky horizon. Rockets! . . . the rockets of the *Ocean Star!*

He shouted an order. The *Susquehanna* swung round to starboard, dug her bows into a great wave that came curling down to break in a thunderous cascade upon her deck, climbed the next with fore-peak silhouetted against the sky. She settled into a dogged head-on contest with an endless succession of furious seas that hurled themselves direct upon her, shot up in straight walls of water with the impact of collision, scudded in sheets of stinging spray high over the bridge.

He looked round. The first officer, binoculars to his eyes, was gazing out to those tiny points of constantly-renewed light towards which they were heading. The third mate was by his side.

"You!" he shouted. "Tell the wireless to talk to them—say we've sighted them!"

The third mate sprang down the ladder in quick obedience.

He pulled at the first officer's arm.

"Send up some answering rockets, Mr. Davidson! Let them see us!"

He was on edge with impatience, with an unreasoning fear lest in their despair that distant ship's company should abandon themselves, hastening the catastrophe, to their fate, founder before he could get close. But there was no benevolence in this seeming altruism. His eyes were as pitiless as that grey sea itself, his face grim as fate incarnate.

Behind him, one rocket after another sizzled, spluttered, rushed into the air, burst into faint watery light far among the clouds to leeward. He leaned against the 'dodger,' steadying himself as best he might on the reeling, lifting, plunging platform of the bridge, searching through his binoculars for a dark spot in the welter of wind-torn spume and ragged cloud that overhung the horizon. He distinguished it—nearer than he had expected—a small, black silhouette, circled with white foam, visible one moment, vanished the next. Its reappearance on the crest of the next wave was a relief after a prolonged moment of suspense. He held it in vision, with eyes unsatiable, as it

grew steadily larger, ever more distinct. The *Ocean Star* was drifting before the gale to meet the *Susquehanna* crashing through the seas towards her. No more rockets went up. The two ships were now clearly in sight of one another.

Seven strokes clanged from the bell above the steersman. All the deck officers of the *Susquehanna* were now upon the bridge. They saw, plainly at last, little more than half a mile away, the ship they had risked so much to reach. She lifted, heavily waterlogged, on the flanks of the great rollers that surged towards them with an overrun of eager foam snatched from their heads in the fury of the wind. She was dangerously down by the stern, the seas washing over her after-works with scarce a check. Her smokeless funnel swayed loosely in its stays. A torn rag of sail, kept her nose more or less up into the wind to meet the breakers that threatened every moment to overwhelm her. As she subsided into the trough, the top of her masts alone visible for a moment, it seemed each time that she had gone. But she rose again, with yet a reserve of buoyancy, on the ridge of the following wave, water streaming in torrentsfrom her flanks. Dark dots of human figures were visible upon her bridge. One of them waved an arm.

Captain Wilmott turned to the chief officer.

"Rig a life-buoy and get the rocket-apparatus!" he ordered curtly. "Take her round to windward."

He stood for one more moment staring at the helpless ship, and then went swiftly down the ladder to the wireless-room.

The operator looked round at him, startled at this unexpected entrance, startled even more at the incomprehensible expression on his skipper's face. Had he gone suddenly mad? The eyes that looked out of that grim, hard-mouthed countenance seemed to blaze at him. An emanation of personality at fever-pitch filled the narrow cabin, belied the tight control of that formidable jaw.

"Are they getting our messages?"

The operator, schooled to discipline, betrayed no perception of that odd note in Captain Wilmott's voice.

" I think so, sir," he replied.

" Right ! Send them another message." Captain Wilmott's tone was sharp and decisive. His eyes gleamed. His hard mouth curved slightly in an irrepressible smile. " Tell Captain Buttevant that Captain Wilmott is in command of this ship ! My compliments to him, and Captain Buttevant would be safer to stay where he is ! "

" Sir ? " The operator looked round in amazed protest.

" Send it ! " The order was peremptory.

The bewildered operator tapped at his key. The satanic crackle of blue flames leaped around the dynamo, ceased with the ending of the message.

" You've sent that ? Now tell them to stand by to catch a rocket-line—and hoist a signal to say they've heard us ! "

Captain Wilmott slammed the door of the wireless-room behind him, clambered once more, against wind and spray, to the bridge.

The *Susquehanna* was making a curve round the crippled ship now close to her, almost under her lee. Her master took in the situation with a glance, clanged the engine-room telegraph sharply to Slow Ahead. Then he looked across to the *Ocean Star* sliding backwards down the slope of a gigantic roller as though she was going to plunge stern-foremost into the depths. Had she got his message ?

There was a movement among the little group of men on her bridge, a little ball went slowly up the halliards to her foremast, broke into a flag. It was the answering pennant. Captain Wilmott smiled grimly. Captain Buttevant had received those ironic compliments. He wondered which of that little group of oil-skinned men was his unidentifiable enemy.

He turned to shout down to the mate rigging the rocket-apparatus amidships.

" Ready, Mr. Davidson ? Stand by for the word ! "

The mate signalled back understanding. The captain turned once more to watch the *Ocean Star.* She drifted towards them, wallowing sluggishly in a smother of foam

every now and then half-submerged under the breaking tops of the great grey-green, frothing rollers which lifted her, dropping with a squattering outwash of water in turmoil under her flanks as the sea passed onward. He measured, with experienced eye, the distance which separated them, awaiting the moment when she should be under his lee, his hand from time to time gesturing a touch of the helm to counter some great wave that threatened to fling the *Susquehanna* on to the wreck. Suddenly the semaphore on the bridge of the *Ocean Star* began to jerk its arms.

He turned to the second mate. "What's she saying, Mr. Trent?"

The second mate frowned, with concentrated attention, at that gesticulating semaphore on the water-logged derelict sagging to them. Then he half-turned to the skipper.

"Woman aboard, sir!" he reported.

Captain Wilmott checked in the middle of a gesture to the helmsman. A woman! Everything seemed to stop in him. The semaphore continued its arm-jerked message. The second mate turned again.

"Says she won't come without captain. What do they mean, sir?"

Captain Wilmott flared at him in a sudden outburst of wrath that startled Mr. Trent out of his glib self-confidence.

"Never mind what they mean? Tell them they can go to hell together!—Semaphore!"

The second mate, cowed under the furious eye of his superior, stepped obediently, without a word, to the semaphore, jerked out the arm.

Captain Wilmott's face was a study in frowning grimness. Then an ugly smile twisted his hard mouth.

"Stop!" he said. The semaphore had not spelt out its first word. "Tell them—tell them they can come together if they like!"

The two ships were almost beam to beam. It was the moment of opportunity. They wallowed in the frothing seas, perilously close. Captain Wilmott turned, shouted down to the mate amidships.

"Mr. Davidson!—*Now!*" He gestured the signal to fire.

With a sizzling swish heard for but an instant in the howl of the sound-swallowing gale, the rocket sped out, trailing a light line that fell clear cross the *Ocean Star's* waist. A cluster of figures on her deck scrambled for it, seized it, hauled away, knee-deep in foaming water. A heavier line was attached to it.

On the bridge, Captain Wilmott manœuvred his ship with an infinite skill, holding her, now with a directing gesture to the helmsman, now with a touch upon the engine-room telegraph, in approximately the same position relative to the wreck. At every moment, a raging, rushing wall of sea threatened to hurl them into collision. At every moment a spasmodic churn of the *Susquehanna's* propellor, just keeping headway on her, a deft spin of the helm that shouldered the oncoming roller, averted the danger. Captain Wilmott's lips were grimly tight, but somewhere in him something kept repeating, with malicious exultation: "Come aboard, would they? . . . Well, let them come!" And he bent all his faculties to ensuring them a safe passage. He would have his meeting after all!

He glanced back to see a life-line rigged between the two ships, a breeches-buoy, sagging down to the smother of angry sea, in operation across the intervening space.

He could spare no attention to its occupant. Maintenance of the *Susquehanna's* position demanded the instant alertness of his whole intelligence. But he snapped out an order to the third mate.

"Tell the steward to get something hot in the saloon for the woman. Take Captain Buttevant in there too. Send the other officers into the engineers' mess. Tell Mr. Davidson to report when they are all aboard."

It seemed an endless time that he stood on that wet bridge baffling the eternal onrushes of the ravening sea, manœuvring to keep his safe distance from the *Ocean Star*, dropping back as the life-line tautened threatening to break, standing away as it slacked with a menace of drowning for the poor, drenched wretch half-way to safety. He could not follow the process of rescue. He only noted

that the breeches-buoy went slowly to and fro from ship to ship. At the back of his mind, a part of himself was preoccupied with the enemy perhaps even then risking the perilous passage to an encounter of man to man. A fraction of that part remembered suddenly that his six-shooter was in his cabin. He wondered, with a nice appreciation of moral torture, what he was feeling like now—that Captain Buttevant? What was he—arrant coward or cynically brave? Well, he's had his warning, he thought—he knows what to expect. He thrilled, an inner self remote from that which conned his ship, with pugnacious expectation of that meeting, face to face at last.

The first mate stood suddenly by his side.

"All aboard, sir," he reported.

Captain Wilmott looked round upon him.

"The captain as well?"

"Captain—and his lady, sir," said the stolid mate. "They're in the saloon."

It seemed to Captain Wilmott that he was uncannily calm in this moment of crisis so long anticipated.

"Very good," he said. "Put her back on her course, Mr. Davidson."

He descended from the bridge, went into his cabin, slipped his revolver into his pocket, went down the second ladder to the deck.

He turned into the saloon, pushed open the door. At the further end, a large-framed man was bending over a female figure of which he could only see the skirts. They did not notice his entrance. He halted, a hand on the revolver in his pocket.

"Captain Buttevant!" he said, his voice harsh in the comparative silence of the saloon. "I'll trouble you to stand away from my wife. You've had her three years—and that's three years too long!"

The man swung round to him, startled. He was a tall, handsome fellow, despite the grey hairs of more than middle age. Captain Wilmott glared at him—glared from him to the woman. She was a matronly creature, double Gwen's years. He had never set eyes on her before.

Captain Buttevant spoke, somewhat angrily. "I don't understand you. My wife's been at sea with me these past *ten* years!" Then, smiling suddenly at a hint from the bewilderment in the other man's face, he added: "I'm not the only Buttevant in the world, you know!"

AT MONTE CARLO

AT MONTE CARLO

March 3rd.—Here we are, then! As, from where I sit at this writing-table, I turn my eyes to the left, I see, cream-white in this blessed sun, the sugar-icing façade of the Casino and, opposite it, against a background of green palms, a large white and gold café with a multitude of outside tables quite summer-like under sun-umbrellas; if I glance to the right, through the windows on the other side of this broadly-curving corner of the room, I see the blue Mediterranean sparkling under a zephyr breeze. And as I look, a silly old song, popular when I was a boy, keeps repeating itself in my head:

"As I walk along . . . the Bois de Boolong
With an independent air
You should see the people stare
And hear the folks declare
There's the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo!"

Something like that it goes—I can't remember it exactly. Does one ever break the bank, I wonder? Funny how a secret hope I shouldn't have the audacity to declare to myself sneaks up the backstairs into one's consciousness!

Some apartment! The usual occupants, I presume, arrive with a valet—I saw the manager glance sharply at my simplicity of baggage. However, he was of course far too sublimely aristocratic to betray the slightest hint of a doubt. I telegraphed for the best apartment available—and I have it. It was already reserved for me—'*Monsieur Geoffrey Cludd—numero quatorze,*' he told the page-boy without a moment of hesitation, as though he carried in his head the allotment of every room in the hotel. Wonderful fellows,

these hotel-managers! I'm superstitious enough to be glad, though, that my number is fourteen, and not thirteen. If I'd found myself shown to the next-door room, I should have felt it a pretty ugly omen. But perhaps they don't have a Number Thirteen, and this room is really——Shut up!

I catch myself smiling, a cynical little smile over clenched teeth, as I glance around me at this extremely good luxury, and see through it, like a fade-out at the movies, that abhorrent little bedroom in the purlieus of Bloomsbury. Was it only the night before last I slept there? It was for the last time. I don't go back. That's one thing utterly certain in a most uncertain world. As for this pretty little hotel-bill I'm incurring, I understand that the Casino authorities not only provide the funeral but pay the hotel-expenses of defunct, unlucky gamblers. I see no reason why I should stint myself on their behalf. On the other hand, if—*shh!* that's asking for trouble—I don't in the least mind paying the most extravagant of hotel-bills. And in the meantime, whatever happens, for a few days at least—I *live!*

Why am I writing all this down? I never was prig enough to keep a diary in my life. *Imprimis*, because I'm damned lonely. If there was a soul in the world I could write to, I'd write him or her a letter. But there isn't. As for that precious crowd that so promptly made themselves scarce when the old man found it advisable to do a little target practice on himself just at the time when a grateful country 'axed' a good many better men than myself in mid-career, if—*shh!*—but *if!*—it will give me the greatest pleasure in life to show them the door when they come crowding in on me again. Poor Old Man! He did his damnedest. He never meant to leave me in the soup. Up to the very last, I fancy, he thought he'd manage to pull out. Pity he hadn't told me—a worse pity that he hadn't brought me into the business, and given me a chance to earn my living. It's a poor qualification for a man over thirty when about the only thing he knows is to shout: 'Company—Tshun!—Carry on, Sergeant-Major.'

. . . Seems a long time ago now. How many years did

I go tramping up and down that damned city, pushing open one office-door after another, hearing in advance their curt : ' Sorry. We have no vacancy ' ? It seems years—one of those nightmares which go on and on for ever in their hopeless horror. Actually it was six months. Six hideous months in which I watched my cash melt and dwindle, in which I felt my soul get more and more down at heel, as well as my shoes. It seems in another existence, but it was only four days ago that I sat in that bedroom looking over my pass-book and found that I had got down to my last fifty. And when that went, as the rest had gone ? It wasn't good enough—it just wasn't good enough. I can hear myself saying it as I sucked at my pipe.

I had, besides, a gold watch, a couple of sets of pearl-studs—from old Aunt Caroline, bless her ! she always bought in Bond Street—one or two other trinkets—say, another fifty in all. I sat looking at them, I remember, and imagined Monte to myself—not a bit like it actually is as I saw it coming up from the station this morning. Actually, the whole caboodle, sold, not pawned, produced seventy, not fifty—hundred and twenty in all. First-class sleeper here, *single*. Nett balance, one hundred, which I have just pushed into this drawer at this very table at which I am sitting.

I sat down to lock them up, along with the other article —the little fellow that was heavy in my hip-pocket all the way, safe from the prying eyes of *douaniers*—and, finding myself sitting in front of paper and a pen, I began to write almost automatically, like talking to myself. Queer ! But I suppose I'm a bit strung up. Well, if that little wad of notes does its duty, it will be interesting to read this afterwards. I often wish I'd kept a diary of my sensations when we went ' over the top ' in the war, and we're going over the top now, old bean, if ever we did. If, on the other hand, my luck's out, this record might have some sort of value for one of the sensational Sunday-papers. Unfortunately, though, I shouldn't get the cash. I shall be dead. That's the size of it. Savvy ?

I had a delightful journey out, in a curious, grim peace with myself, all my humiliations left behind me once for all. I had one of those new, blue, single-berth sleepers, and

I didn't speak to a soul all the way. Yes, I did, though. I exchanged a couple of words on the scenery with that girl who was standing in the corridor, looking out of the window. I bumped into her as the train swayed. Her face gave me a queer little shock as she turned it on me—a pure oval of exquisitely carved features, with large, questioning eyes that seemed to hesitate upon one, making sure of sympathy. I had an absurd impulse to ask her on the spot what was the matter—could I help? I suppressed it, of course. I have not come out here to mix myself up with the eternal feminine. That's finished with. I'm here for one very definite, single-minded purpose, and I'm not going to complicate it with any other consideration.

What a crew she was with, though! I saw them on the station (they got out here), the fat woman, heavily-furred, thick with paint; the big man with the nose; the other fellow with the diamond and the mean, little furtive eyes—I don't know which was the husband. What the devil is a girl like that doing with such a crowd?—like a troop of Hebraic satyrs leading about a Madonna! That's poetic, dashed if it isn't. And quite enough of it, my lad. It's none of your business. You mind your own. To-day is Friday. If you wake up alive on the morning of Saturday week, you may make love to any girl in the world that takes your fancy. Until then—you're under suspended sentence, and it's blind and dumb you are to every kind of woman.

. . . . . .

Later.—Well, we've made our reconnaissance in force—and been repulsed. Enemy resistance very strong. Quite like old times, when we felt for the Boche line at Mont St. Quentin. Let's put it all down.

My first instinct as I left the hotel this afternoon was to go straight across to the Casino and test my luck. I refrained deliberately, with an effort, because I felt myself shaky with suppressed anxiety. And I don't propose to be anxious. If this is the last week I have to live, I propose to enjoy it. And when I go into that Casino to fight for my life, it's going to be with a clear head and steady nerves. So I

made myself turn to the right from the hotel and admire the view. It's something to admire—that great rock with the castle on it on the opposite side of the land-locked little bay; the low town on the water-level in the sack of the inlet, to which the road on which I stood descended in a long slope; the mountains up behind; the fascinating little harbour sheer underneath one with its two granite moles that almost meet. But all the time, as I looked doggedly, I was conscious of the pull of that elaborately ornate, cream-white building behind my back.

At last I caved in. After all, this was what I had come for. I would test my—*veine*, I think they call it. If good, I'd go on until I felt the tide turning. If bad—I'd go on until I had lost 500 francs. That was the limit I set for myself, to be rigidly observed. So I decided as I stood looking over that romantically picturesque little bay.

As I went in, I had rather a nasty jolt for a welcome. Sitting on one of the side-seats of the big atrium, before one passes into the gambling-rooms, was a young man, haggard, hatless, his dishevelled hair tousled over his forehead, staring straight in front of him with fixed and awful eyes. I could not help stopping to look at him. He did not move. Apparently, he was quite oblivious to his surroundings. He stared at—I could guess well enough at what he was staring. One or two attendants fidgeted round him uneasily, obviously ready to fling themselves upon him if he pulled anything from his pocket.

A girl came out of the doors beyond, a girl with her lips a vivid red. She also stopped and looked at him, pity in her heavily-blackened eyes. He stared right through her. She made a movement towards him, hesitated, and then spoke. It was evident from her manner that he was a total stranger to her. He did not hear. She came closer, spoke again, touched him on the shoulder—shook him. He started convulsively with his whole body, looked up at her, moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue as though he were going to speak. But he said nothing. He just looked at her with those awful eyes. She spoke again; I couldn't catch the words. But she opened her vanity-bag, took out a note, gave it him. He looked at it

incredulously, sprang to his feet, and with one raucous, inarticulate cry—without thanking her—leaped towards those doors from which she had emerged.

I followed him. It was the gambling-room—a number of tables clustered about with a crowd at each. He was already at the *changeur's* booth, getting counters for his note. I watched him as he darted back to a table, consulted a crumpled piece of paper, black with pencilled figures—and then, with feverish haste, commenced to stake his counters, in little piles, here and there all over the numbered squares on the green cloth. The roulette was already spinning. He stood, with one last counter in his hand, obviously clutched in an atrocious hesitation. Then that last counter he also dabbed down upon a number, just as the impassive attendant cried his '*Rien ne va plus.*'

The disc was still spinning, the little ball jumping on it from one number to another. He wiped the perspiration from his brow with his bare hand as he stared at it. The disc slowed down, its red and black clearly distinct, the ball at rest. The wearily unemotional attendant called out the result in his toneless voice, the *croupier* reached out his rake—swept away every one of those little piles of counters towards the bank. For yet another moment that young man stood there, transfixed, staring at that empty table—and then, with a horrible, gurgling, choking noise in his throat, he ran—absolutely ran—towards the doors. No one even looked up at him. The attendant was calling '*Faites vos jeux,*' the roulette was spinning again.

Shall I look like that *if* . . . ? No, my lad, you'll set your teeth, smile, and walk out quietly, very quietly.

And then, quite steadily and very regularly, I lost my 500 francs. It took precisely one hour and a half, for my stakes were small. I'm not *flinging* money on that green table until I catch a hint of a smile on the blind goddess's inscrutable face. I guess she was testing my nerve this afternoon, just as I was testing her mood. Evidently, we can both be obstinate.

But that's not the end of a perfect day. At dinner tonight, in the immense *salle-à-manger*, white and gold and palm-filled, where the orchestra played like a dream over

the crowd of bare-backed females and their attendant, dinner-jacketed banking accounts, I suddenly looked up to see that girl. I didn't know they had come to this hotel. There they were, that horrible woman, those two carrion-beaked men—and that Madonna-like creature: beautiful, wistful, silent. Other men were eyeing her. She took no notice of them. Her big eyes were fixed steadily on me—I realised it with a peculiar little shock—as if in some intensely-sped, telepathic appeal. The lids went down over them sharply as she met my glance. I thought I saw a little colour come into her white face. For a moment I was held in a sort of spell, where I felt my heart beginning to thump—then I pulled myself together. Nothing of that sort for you, Geoffrey my lad, this side of Saturday week! I had finished my meal, and I got up from my table and went straight out of the room without another glance at her.

I took my coffee over at the Café de Paris, away from the hotel, and while I watched first the few more-impatient gamblers and then the steady stream of the after-dinner crowd passing into the Casino I found myself puzzling over that girl instead of my own sufficiently interesting affairs. Who and what was she? A decoy? Her companions had 'wrong 'un' written all over them. Yet it seemed impossible that she could lend herself. . . . Anyway, it was none of my business. I shut off my thoughts with a snap, went across to the Casino.

There, once more, quite steadily and regularly, I lost my 500 francs. I was two hours over it, for sometimes I won a few back. Half-way through the performance I looked up to see that precious trio, the fat woman and the two men, seated at my table. They were winning, of course. They would! I glanced round for the girl, but she had evidently not accompanied them. They were still playing when, having seen my last counter raked in by the *croupier*, I quitted.

Steadying my nerves with a much-needed cigarette, I went across to the hotel. The lounge was deserted. I sat down in a secluded corner to figure things out. It had been a bad start. This first day I had lost 1,000 francs—twenty

good English pounds at the current rate. Five days of that would finish me. And for one minimum week I was and am determined to live. Henceforth, my lad, your limit is 600 francs in any one day—*until the last*—and then you go in to the last cent. I had just arrived at this decision when I saw her on the threshold of the lounge.

She stood for a moment, framed in the doorway, timid and beautiful in her simple, black evening-dress, glancing about her as though in search of someone. I was the only person in the place. And all of a sudden, as her eyes rested on me in my corner, I realised, with that same queer little jump inside me that I had had at dinner, that it was I she was looking for. She came across to me. I got on to my feet, feeling ridiculously awkward. What did she want with me? Perhaps to ask where her companions were? I plunged at that as she stood, hesitating in a sudden timidity, in front of me. To look into those eyes set a man's senses in a whirl.

"Your friends are still at the Casino, I think." I hope I sounded polite.

"I know," she said, in that rich, low-toned voice I remembered from the train. I could feel her eyes looking not merely into my face, but searching my very soul. I was glad in that moment that I've always been a pretty straight sort of chap. Had I been otherwise, those eyes would have found me out. She did not smile. "I thought you might be here," she added seriously. "I looked in a little time ago—twice."

I was utterly bewildered.

"Won't you sit down?" My invitation was as lamely awkward as a self-conscious schoolboy's. Why on earth did she want to look for me? Surely her companions could not have taken me for a fat pigeon to be plucked, sent her . . . No. I had seen their experienced eyes sum me up in a single glance, pass over me disdainfully. And this—I received the full impression of those large, grey orbs, that pure white brow, those sensitive, fine-curved lips innocent of rouge, as I sat down beside her—this was surely no vulgar decoy. What was the matter?

"Can I help you in any way?" I asked.

The faintest smile came on her face.

"I was waiting for you to ask that," she replied, "ever since you spoke to me in the train." The large eyes came full on me. "I knew you would. And I knew that I could trust you."

Inwardly, I jibbed. At any other time . . . but now, in this crucial, all-absorbing week of life or death! I was not in the mood for knight-errantry.

"What's the matter?"

She was still looking at me.

"I want a friend."

I kept a tight hand on myself.

"Yes?" I said, cautiously but encouragingly.

"Are you here for some time?" I noticed her eyes glance up to the clock, stray uneasily towards the door.

"Certainly for a week," I replied, with a grim little subtlety of humour that was for myself alone. I remembered my automatic upstairs, lying locked in the drawer of this table at which I am writing. "After that——" I shrugged my shoulders. "But you haven't told me what is wrong."

She was about to speak, when I heard a murmur of voices behind the glass door leading to the hall.

"*Shh!*" She put a finger to her lips, darted to a seat at a table a little way off, picked up an illustrated paper, was apparently absorbed in it.

That engaging trio came into the lounge, chattering to each other with thick voices. They were evidently surprised to see her.

"Is your headache better, my dear?" asked the woman, with the oily, ingratiating smile with which her ancestors had certainly sold old clothes in Petticoat Lane.

The girl looked up, her face white and expressionless.

"It passed off, Mrs. Franks. I was waiting for you in case you might want me."

The trio sat down at her table, ordered whiskies-and-sodas. No one paid any attention to me. I got up and walked out, came to my room where I have just written this. What the devil . . . ?

. . . . . .

March 4th.—Day Number Two! We are 1,600 francs to the bad. I have the most diabolical luck. I played this afternoon and this evening. Lost 300 francs each time. 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' And conversely. An obviously well-to-do fellow at my table won so much that his pockets could hardly hold it at the end. Curiously enough, when I followed his lead for a time and staked on the same numbers, he lost. I left off, not wanting to spoil his luck. It gives one a twinge of superstition. I could not help opening the drawer for a glance at my neat little automatic before sitting down to write. Is that, after all, going to be the way out? . . . Nonsense! We have still five more days. Pull your socks up, my lad.

As to that girl (in my dreams last night I went through the most fantastic adventures with her)—nothing. We have not exchanged a word. She scarcely glanced at me in the dining-room. All the time, she has been with that loathly trio. They have picked up a fourth—a weedy fellow with a Bond Street tailor and a face like a rabbit. He was all eyes for the girl. The two gentlemen with the noses were all eyes for *him*, despite their careful carelessness of manner. The fat woman sat and simpered, exuding a greasy self-satisfaction. And, when she had to, the girl smiled, like the picture of a Madonna might smile—a miracle every time—but, well, the smile of a picture.

What's the game? I deprived the Casino of twenty francs to ask a waiter a few questions. He knew only the names of the trio: Mr. and Mrs. Franks, Mr. Braham—the tall one. The girl?—Miss Maynard; he shrugged his shoulders to express the limit of his knowledge. The fourth?—*Milord* Shrimpton. I seem to remember something about that young gentleman—a recent heir to a million, or words to that effect. The painted ladies droop heavily-blackened lashes at him as they rustle past his chair. . . . Well, it's none of my business. I've got all I want to think about. This morning, as I explored the picturesque old town of Monaco high up on the other side of the bay and soaked in the blessed sunshine, I wondered where I should be this day week. I have heard nothing of

the fate of that poor wretch who bolted out of the Casino yesterday. Apparently, one doesn't.

. . . . . .

March 7th.—Day Number Five! I'm beginning to feel like that chap in one of Edgar Allan Poe's stories who watched the walls, roof and floor gradually, slowly, and murderously contracting the cubic space of his prison. Two more days! . . . It's extraordinary that the more desperately a man wants a touch of good luck, the more it is tantalisingly withheld. All Monte Carlo is talking about some Greek banker-fellow who has won half-a-million francs in the last two days. He was already worth several millions. And I have lost 3,400 francs up to date, 600 each of these last three days. I put it on record, it wanted a bit of courage to break off when I had reached my self-imposed limit—the chance that the luck might turn with the next spin of the roulette almost too tempting to be resisted. But I set my teeth, walked out of that Casino, and *smiled*. I'm not going to cringe and whine. If Fortune really means 'thumbs down,' so be it. But I walk out into the darkness with my head high, O Goddess! *Compre?*

As for that girl, I haven't had another word with her, not even a glance of understanding. And I'm *glad*. The impression she made on me is beginning to fade off—at least, I hope it is. She's vivid enough in my dreams, too vivid. It gives one a queer feeling, in the light of day, to see her pass without a hint of recognition. At meal-times she sits like a carven statue, with that poor, rabbit-faced fool staring at her as though mesmerised, and the eyes of the trio glittering as they almost wink at one another.

My friend the waiter thought fit to come to me this morning with another twenty-franc's-worth of information. Apparently he mistakes me for a detective of some sort. It is now explained why I have seen none of them in the Casino these last few nights. Each evening there's been a select little gambling party in the private suite occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Franks. The *milord* was there, of course. And *mademoiselle?* Mademoiselle also—no, she did not gamble—but the fat woman made her sing at the piano and

the *milord* was *vraiment enchanté*—that was before they got out the cards. My waiter ministered to the party with whiskies-and-sodas all the evening, particularly to the rabbit-faced *milord*. "*Et, monsieur, comme elle chante, cette jeune dame—comme un ange!*" he added, with unnecessary enthusiasm. The whole thing turned me a little sick. She is the decoy, then, after all—and whatever her first repugnance, if repugnance it had been that made her speak to me, she now acquiesces.

I couldn't get the thing out of my mind. It blackened the sunshine for me in my morning's walk, took all the beauty out of the scene, though the sea was magically blue under rocks that were all mistily pink with peach and almond blossom. It was too foolish. What business is it of mine? I had it out with myself—cleared her definitely and once for all from my mind. Hang it all! It is too ridiculous that I should spoil what are in all probability the last two days of my life with brooding over the bitter fact that the beauty of a woman's face is no criterion of the beauty of her soul. It's the oldest, most often exploded of illusions!

. . . . . .

March 8th—and Day the Sixth.—I would not write this if I had a chance of sleep or a pal I could talk to. It's long past midnight. I've been looking out of my window over the sea, yellowed with the setting moon, until I've got chilled. Better sit down, talk to myself on paper, get my thoughts clear to myself, than lie in bed and stare at the darkness with my head on fire. And I'll begin at the beginning.

I lost my 600 francs as usual, of course—lost them steadily, winning back a few every now and then, but losing regularly on balance, until the last was gone. I shut off a tempting demon inside me that egged me on to continue, risk everything, finish it one way or the other, to-night. Seven days I had sworn to myself I would have, and I held firm. I walked out of that Casino, picked up my overcoat at the *vestiaire*, lit a cigarette, and went out into the night. It was still barely ten o'clock, and I revolted

from sitting in the lounge of the hotel for the next hour or so. My mood was too exasperatedly desperate to endure the sight of that chattering, laughing gang of men and women, crassly complacent in their comfortable opulence, that surely filled it.

I turned to the left, went a few hundred yards along the street that slopes down the flank of the harbour, and then, gripped suddenly by the fascinating beauty of the moonlit night—if it were cloudy to-morrow I might never see another—I stooped and leaned over the stone balustrade to contemplate the view. To my right, the street-lamps went down in a long, straight string of jewels to the mass of twinkling lights where the Condamine huddled at the foot of its just discernible mountain. Opposite, the rock of Monaco rose ghostily, the ascending string of lights connecting it with the Condamine clustering themselves to a chaplet on its brow. Below, jutting out towards each other, white on the shimmering,milky-blueness of the water, the two granite arms of the port terminated in the little lighthouses with their lamps of red and green—two spots of pure contrasting colour placed as by an artist in the blue-grey effulgence with which the whole was bathed. A warm little breeze came from Africa. Behind me, from one of the hotels, came snatches of soft, scarcely-heard music.

It was a night in which a poet might write immortal verse. I cannot describe the impression it made on me. I found myself thrilling with it, as I absorbed it. This time to-morrow? To-morrow, either my luck would miraculously change, *or* . . . I gazed out over the moonlit harbour and tried to make it real to myself that it would look just the same after I was tucked away in whatever obscure spot it is that they bury the unlucky ones.

I don't know what it was that made me turn my head—but I recognised her at once, with that same, queer little inward shock, obscured though her face was by the shadow from her hat and her figure shapeless in a heavy cloak. She came towards me.

"I felt that I should find you here," she said.

I composed myself to sternness as I looked into her face,

armoured myself against her eyes. I was polite enough to behave as if I had no doubts of her.

"You ought not to be alone out here like this," I replied, ignoring the appeal in her voice. "Let me take you back to the hotel."

She made a vehement little gesture of revolt.

"No! no! I cannot go back to the hotel—I will never go back!" Despite my scepticism, her agitation puzzled me. Was I misjudging her?

"What's the matter?" I said.

She looked at me, and once more I surrendered to the truthfulness of those eyes.

"You promised to be my friend?"

For all the overwhelming spell of her, it was all I could do not to shrug my shoulders in the irony of this appeal. She could not have picked a more hopelessly useless person in the whole of Monte Carlo. I had no illusions about my eleventh-hour chance of luck. I was as good as a dead man already. However:

"I'll do anything I can to help you," I said. "But I am afraid you have chosen a very poor reed on which to lean."

"No, no!" she replied, with emphatic certainty. "It is you who can help me—and only you! I felt it when I first saw you in the train."

I'm afraid I *did* shrug my shoulders then.

"Look here," I said, "you mustn't be seen standing talking to me here. Someone in the hotel might spot you, and think things. Let us go for a walk, and you can tell me all about it. Come along!"

We walked down the long slope which leads to the lower town, and on the way I got her story. She was an orphan, of course—she would be! It was just like the perverse cussedness of Fate to thrust such a dangerously beautiful creature utterly unprotected into the world. All her life, she had lived in the country, somewhere down in Somerset. Her mother had died when she was a baby. Her father had died six months ago, and left her without a bean. The solicitor had told her that when the furniture was sold it would scarcely be sufficient to pay

his debts. At first she had gone to live with friends, acting as governess to their two little girls. But the master of the house had begun to pay her attentions—she was evasive on this point, but I gathered that he must have been a thoroughly objectionable cad—and things had got decidedly difficult. Then she had seen in the newspaper the advertisement of a lady who desired a young girl as a travelling companion. She had scraped together her last few shillings, and gone up to London to be interviewed by her prospective employer. Mrs. Franks, of course!

"At first, I thought she was awfully nice," said the girl, looking at me as though fearful I should misjudge her for taking up with such a gang. "She engaged me on the spot, although she had had crowds of other applicants, she told me. And she was so kind. She took me round to all the best London shops and bought me the most beautiful new clothes."

"Did she?" I commented ironically. I had a pretty shrewd idea that Mrs. Franks was not a woman to waste her money. "And Mr. Franks and the other fellow—were they on the scene?"

"We came away to Monte Carlo almost at once," she replied. "I only saw Mr. Franks the day before we started, and Mr. Braham joined us at the railway station. It was in the train that—that I began to have a feeling that they were not very nice people."

"Indeed!" I remarked. We had passed along the quay-front of the lower town, were now ascending, mechanically, without heeding where we were going, the steep way that leads through the old fortified gateways to the town of Monaco.

"Even then I wasn't sure—but somehow I felt afraid, though I can't tell you what it was I was afraid of. Mrs. Franks was most kind and considerate—she's vulgar, of course, but I forgave her that for her good-heartedness, as I thought. She treated me more like her own daughter than a paid companion. It was the conversation between Mr. Franks and Mr. Braham that first made me uneasy. They were talking about people they expected to meet at Monte Carlo—and whether they were 'likely' people or

not, and how much this or the other one might be 'good for.' Mrs. Franks snubbed them once or twice for such talk in front of me. And then I had a dreadful shock. I had been dozing in my corner, and she must have thought I was still asleep. She began to whisper to them in such a cunning, wicked way that my blood ran cold. I got up and went out into the corridor. Then I saw you and something seemed to say to me: Here's a friend! And then you spoke to me."

We were now well up the height, the many lights of Monte Carlo scintillating across the moon-misty bay. There was a seat in one of the embrasures of these seventeenth-century fortifications.

"I think we've gone far enough," I said. "Let's sit down." We did so. "Now tell me exactly what is wrong. They've been using you as a decoy, I suppose, for that rabbit-faced fellow. Has he lost much?"

She glanced at me.

"You guessed, then?"

"My dear young lady, your companions are fairly obvious," I remarked.

She stared out across the bay.

"What you must have thought of me!" she mused. The exquisite beauty of her profile gave me a feeling of rarefied air inside my chest. I reacted against it.

"Never mind what I thought of you. I confess you puzzled me," I said rather roughly. "But we understand each other now. Things have come to a head, I presume?"

"To-night," she murmured. "I did not fully understand until to-night the part I was being made to play. I went to Mrs. Franks at once and demanded to be sent home." She shuddered at an evidently unpleasant reminiscence.

"What happened?"

"At first, she coaxed and wheedled me, trying to persuade me that it was all my imagination. And then, quite suddenly, when she saw it was all no use, she turned on me like a fiend. She frightened me. She told me that I would have to do whatever she told me—that I was a little fool—that lots of girls would be glad of the chances she was putting in my way—that I was in her power—that

she utterly refused to give me any money to go home with—that if I was obstinate she'd turn me adrift penniless on the street at Monte Carlo. I made an excuse to go to my room, put on my hat and cloak, took my passport, and slipped downstairs to look for you. You were not in the lounge. So I came out. I felt somehow you would be there."

"And what do you want me to do?" said I.

"I have a cousin near London who will look after me until I can find some more work. But I have no money for my fare, and I must have a little to go on with. I want you to lend me twenty pounds." She had evidently thought out precisely what she wanted, said it as though it were the simplest, most natural thing in the world.

"Twenty pounds!" I echoed. I was suddenly acutely conscious of the four five-pound notes in my pocket—the last!

She looked up at me.

"That is not a very important amount to you, is it?"

I managed to refrain from an ironic laugh. That trifling amount happened to be precisely the difference between one remaining chance of life and certain death. If I gave it to her, I might as well shoot myself upon the spot. Apart from those notes, I had only a few loose centimes in my pocket. I don't know now what I was going to say, but I caught her eyes fixed on me in quietly confident reliance and I hedged.

"And supposing I said that I cannot lend it to you?"

I saw a tremor pass over her face.

"Then I throw myself into the water," she said with a finality that was quite devoid of the theatrical. "I will never go back to that hotel." I had no doubt that she meant what she said.

In fiction, the noble hero would have said carelessly: 'Here you are, my dear young lady,' and handed her over his last ha'penny with a fine indifference to his own fate. I'm afraid I'm not quite so sublimely heroic. What has to be, has to be, but I'm not going to pretend that I ever liked the prospect of looking into the muzzle of that neat little automatic of mine. To me, as I sat there, it was an extremely ugly little dilemma.

She sat quietly awaiting my decision.

It came to me in a sudden little rush, quite apart from my will or my thoughts. I might as well finish with a clean taste in my mouth. That was how it phrased itself. I happened to have a pocket time-table on me. I consulted it, glanced at my watch.

"There's a train just after midnight," I said. "It stops at Monaco. You've got time to catch it here. You change at Marseilles for an express."

I said it in the most casual way I could. Obviously, I could not tell the girl that it was equivalent to my death-warrant. And I saw no sense in making any particular merit of it. She had far better think it was a matter of absolute ease to me.

But at the same time I was secretly a trifle dashed by the simplicity with which she accepted it. It isn't every day a fellow chucks away his last chance of life for a girl he scarcely knows—even if she is, like that girl into whose face I looked for a moment, beautiful as a Madonna, with great sincere eyes that let you into the innocence of her soul as into a church, with that indefinable magnetic emanation of personality that sets every nerve in a man's body tingling and—if he were not under sentence of death—would send him to his knees beside her, begging and praying for her love. I crushed all that back into myself, but, casual as I was, I felt somehow she ought to have guessed. She didn't.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I knew I could trust you to help me. Ought we to be going to the station?"

Those commonplace words put the whole thing into the proper perspective. After all, there was nothing so very wonderful in what I was doing—it was mere chance that I happened to be up against it instead of the wealthy young fellow she thought me.

"We ought," I agreed. "Come along. I'll see you into the train."

We got to the station just five minutes before the train came in. I bought her a ticket right through to London, gave her the balance of the money. She would not arrive

penniless, would have enough until she got some sort of job. She looked at me.

"I shall of course pay you back," she said. "Directly I earn some money. Where shall I find you?"

I smiled.

"I shall not be leaving Monte Carlo," I replied, with a touch of grim humour. "But that doesn't matter. You need not worry about repaying me."

"Of course, I insist," she said. I shrugged my shoulders. "You have not asked me for my address in London," she added, in a tone that I thought hinted a suspicion of pique at my lack of future interest in her. "But you must have it. I cannot go away owing you this money without your knowing where to ask for it if you need it. Give me a pencil."

I obeyed, and she wrote an address in my notebook.

The train came in. I put into her an empty compartment, climbed up to the door for a last word of good-bye.

We said it. I held her hand, looking into her eyes, and then—just as the guard was blowing his ridiculous little horn—suddenly, without a word, in a mutual impulse of madness, as though moved by something not ourselves, we bent together and our lips met in one long kiss. It went through me like a discharge of electricity. (My God, I've got the feel of it still!) I wrenched myself away, closed the door, dropped off the already moving train. She was gone.

. . . The dawn is replacing the moonlight over the sea. In my pocket is one franc twenty centimes—I've just counted it—every cent of money I have in the world. Shall I make an end of it now? What is there to wait for? . . . I've been fingering my good little automatic. No! Seven days I swore to myself I'd have, and seven days I'll have. I'll have one more day to-morrow—it is already to-day—wandering about in the blessed sunshine, seeing her beauty in the blue of the sea, in the loveliness of the almond blossom on the rocks. And then, at the last minute, when the clock strikes midnight—Good-bye to everything. In the meantime, I sleep—or at least doze—for an hour

or two. I might dream—dream I'm with her in that train now well on its way to Marseilles.

. . . . . .

The last hour of the seventh day. The first thing I did as I sat down at this table was to take my automatic from the drawer and put it on the table in front of me. It gives me a queer sensation to contemplate it.

What a day! This morning I spent every centime I had on a packet of cheap cigarettes, and went for a walk in the golden sunshine. Never have I known life so vivid—the white houses dazzling against the blue of the sky, the chatter of the birds in the trees, the massed colours of the tulips in the gardens, the exquisite Japanese-touch of fruit-blossom peeping above a wall, the blue and purple of the sea just fringed with white in the embrace of a rocky cove: I perceived them all with curiously sharpened senses. And on my lips was still the feel of her kiss. I looked at everything saying to myself that I saw it for the last time. I was not miserable or morbid. I had come to the end of my tether—and I was glad that the end was among so much beauty. I did not regret my last night's action. On the contrary, it gave me a deep little thrill of satisfaction which pervaded the day. For once in my life, I'd done something worth while. I imagined her, now well on her way home.

It was curious with what indifference I passed the Casino.

I lunched with appetite at the hotel. That precious trio were there, with their rabbit-faced prey. They were talking eagerly, evidently disturbed and anxious. I could guess the theme of their conversation. I felt really sorry for little rabbit-face. He looked quite haggard and desperate. In the middle of lunch, the manager of the hotel came in and talked to them, bringing what I surmise was a police-report. For a moment or two I felt uncomfortably apprehensive. But they did not even glance at me. Evidently, I had not been identified in connection with her disappearance.

In the afternoon I went round to the Monaco side of the bay and sat on the seat where last night she had said so calmly: "I want you to lend me twenty pounds." Supposing I had not lent it—had gone into the Casino this

morning? No, I did *not* regret—I was glad. For such a kiss as I could feel still on my mouth, for such a look as that last look from her eyes, I'd die a dozen times over.

I dressed for dinner, for the last time, with a curious scrupulousness of care. I caught myself grimly smiling at myself in the mirror as I manipulated my tie. For the last time, I sat myself to eat in that great dining-room filled with the murmurous chatter of the bare-backed females and their irreproachably dressed males, sitting there as though each of them expected to live for a thousand years. It was with a peculiar fastidiousness of epicureanism that I selected from the *menu*—the Casino authorities would have the pleasure of footing the bill to-morrow—and listened to the orchestra playing like a dream. My palate was abnormally sensitive, my ear keen. And deep down in me was a cynical sense of humour. I had reserved for myself the last word in the jest that life and I bandied to each other. Fragmentarily, too, I saw that girl with the Madonna eyes, leaning back in her corner of the railway-carriage, nearing her journey's end.

After my coffee, I went out into the night for one last stroll under the rising moon. I stood contemplating the Casino—that temple of the blind, inscrutable goddess where so many before me had staked their last desperate chance of life, and lost. I thought of that poor wretch a week ago. Thank God, I was not making such an abject exhibition of myself. I glanced at my watch. Nine o'clock. . . . Yet three hours.

As I stood there contemplating with a curious detachment that entrance into which the after-dinner crowd was already streaming, my fingers went mechanically to fidget in the pocket of my waistcoat. To my surprise, I felt something there—something round and smooth. I drew it out. It was one of the Casino gambling-counters—value fifty francs. I must have absent-mindedly stuck it in that pocket the previous night.

There was obviously only one thing to do with it. The Casino had had all the rest. Manifestly, it ought to have this. I would finish completely, to the uttermost last.

It was with a curious little thrill that I entered the

Casino to fling this last symbol of life into the lap of the goddess who had disdained me. So completely had I divorced myself from the place all day that it seemed years since I had been there. The people crowding just as usual round the tables seemed strange, unreal, like ghosts condemned to go on for ever and ever. I was absurdly sorry for them.

For a moment I dallied with the idea of changing my token into five-franc pieces, having ten chances. I rejected it. No. Finish! I went up to the nearest table, flung my counter down at hazard upon a number. The wheel was spinning. Once more, I heard the attendant's melancholy voice: '*Rien ne va plus*,' and then the result. My interest was so dead that I did not even hear the number he called out. I stood there merely waiting for my counter to be raked in by the *croupier*. To my surprise, it did not disappear. Instead, he tossed another fifty francs, followed by seventeen counters of a hundred each, to join it.

My impulse, of course, was to pick it all up. Then, deliberately, I refrained. I was not going to be played cat-and-mouse with at the last minute by the sardonically capricious goddess I had so long wooed in vain. The final result would be the same as every other night. I had gone through all that, finished with it. This was the end. Had I been allowed, I would have left the whole eighteen-hundred francs lying on that number. But the bank takes no fantastic chances—limits its liability on anyone stake to six thousand francs. I did the nearest thing I could. I left a hundred-and-fifty francs lying on that number, put four little piles of three hundred francs each upon the lines framing it, and a couple of hundred francs at each extremity of the transverse column which contained it. I had still a fifty-franc counter in my hand. That also I dabbed down on the corner of the same little square. I caught myself smiling grimly, thrilled oddly in this contemptuous defiance of Fortune. I had finished with her. She could take all at the next spin of the wheel.

Once more the roulette spun, the attendant called out his warning and the result. Once more I expected to see my money disappear. There was a momentary pause, and

then upon that little square commenced to rain down, not merely hundred-franc counters, but thousand-franc notes —twenty-five of them upon the square itself, two at each extremity of the transverse column. I stood bewildered, staring at it all like one in a trance.

"*A vous, monsieur!*" said the *croupier*, indicating me with his rake.

I can't explain what came over me. I was like a man paralysed. I just stood and stared at that heap of wealth that seemed fantastic, unreal, certain to vanish if I touched it. It did not seem my own voice that answered curtly: "*Je sas bien.*"

And then I went mad—there is no other word for it. *I would have none of it!* Once more I flung back the gift of Fortune in her face, with a wild peversity made the loss certain, staked it all again, as nearly as I could, upon the improbable hazard of that number which had already won twice. Feverishly, I distributed it round the nucleus of the hundred-and-fifty francs left upon the figure itself—four little piles upon the lines, four upon the corners of the square, four upon the extremities of the transverse lines, two upon the transverse columns. The play waited for a moment while the *croupier* gave me the necessary change for four of my notes.

I had still a bundle of them in my hand when these higher-odds stakes were finished. I planked them down, as fast as I could, in a trembling frenzy to be rid of them—three of them upon the middle longitudinal column, three of them upon the middle 'dozen', six each upon 'passe' and 'pair', the remainder and five hundred-franc counters upon the 'colour'. I had very nearly staked the maximum possible —and I stood with nothing in my hand, my senses reeling, my mouth dry, people staring at me all round the table.

The impassive *croupier* shrugged his shoulders as once more the roulette went spinning. It was no business of his if I cared to behave like a madman. For the same number to come out three times consecutively was one of those miracles that do not happen. I felt it so, too, in a sudden lightning-flash of sanity, in an awful shock at my heart.

In a wild impulse of remorse I shot out my arms to rescue it all—and, before my finger-tips had touched anything, the attendant called: "*Rien ne va plus!*.' I was too late.

I stood watching all that spread-out money, tantalisingly mine for such a short instant, with the perspiration breaking out on my brow. I could have screamed. And then——

There was a murmur of astonishment all round the table. People stood up to crane their necks at the little white ball now immobile in the slowly revolving disc. Once more the attendant shrugged his shoulders. Everyone was looking at me as he commenced to pay out note after note after note, fluttering down upon all that stake which came back to me, section by section, as he disposed of it. There was already a heap in front of me when he stopped.

"*Attendez un petit moment, monsieur.*"

Another attendant went quickly off across the room. Play at that table was suspended until he returned. I stood there, dizzy, the lights of the room tracing blurred coruscations in front of my eyes, feeling that I was going to sway and fall. Someone gave me a chair. I sat down in it, put out my hands over all that money, waited. I scarcely heard the envious congratulations of those around me, the murmur all round the table as the players waited for the resumption of the game. *I had broken the bank!*

For a minute or two only that pause lasted. And then the attendant came back swiftly with a new supply of cash. Once more the notes came fluttering down in front of me. I could not even attempt to keep count. When I saw that he had finished, I stuffed those sheaves of money into every pocket that I had, embarrassed to find a place for it all, my hands full at the end. Then tossing a thousand-franc note to the *croupier*, I got up—my head on fire—and ran, *ran*, just as absurdly, just as desperately as that poor wretch a week ago, out of the Casino.

The money is all out upon the table in front of me as I write, with my automatic on top of it in a grim little contrast that makes me smile. I imagine to myself that its round, black muzzle is bad-temperedly disappointed. . . . I write all this because there no use going to bed—I couldn't

sleep in my excitement, because I want to keep for myself, all the long miraculous years I have yet to live, a record of this moment. . . . I have won over a hundred and thirty-six thousand francs—*one hundred—and thirty—six—thousand——!!* It looks bigger in francs . . . I've just rung for the hotel people to come and lock it up in their safe.

What shall I do with it? Take it back to the Casino—follow up my luck, win—how much might one win? *No!* Never in my life will I enter a Casino again. It is not a fortune—but it's a fighting-fund with which a man can win fortune—I can feel and see myself galloping a blood-horse round a stock-farm in Rhodesia, in a vast horizon where sugar-icing casinos are difficult even to imagine. I've already booked a sleeper for to-morrow. I've already sent a telegram to that address written in my pocket-book. She'll get it about the time she wakes up to-morrow morning. Will she say: Yes? I still feel that kiss upon my mouth. . . .

THE DRUM

THE DRUM

THE fly of the ridge-pole tent was up and the officer sitting within at the camp-table, under the hurricane-lamp against which immense and fearsomely humming beetles dashed themselves, had a fantastic nocturnal view of black soldiers in European uniforms crouching, grotesquely illuminated in an extravagance of facial gesture, about the red glow of cooking fires, and beyond them the dark wall of the stockade crenelated against the star-powdered blue of the sky. He was dressed in the *negligé* of an open-throated shirt above his breeches and boots, but the holster of a heavy Service revolver was still strapped to his waist.

Still young and not unhandsome, his face had that character common to those who hold authority in solitary places. The line of the jaw was fashioned into a certain grimness of weight by the habit of swift decisions and dogged endurances, his eyes, veiled for his private thoughts, could be instantly alert. He sat, with a compression of his mouth, motionless, bent for listening, at that table laid with tin plates and knives and forks for two. From out of the dark night where the stars winked in complicity, issuing from that primeval jungle, eternally present to his mind, which was an immense interlacement of gloom about this precarious outpost of invading civilisation, came an insistent sonorous drumming that filled the air and beat upon his ears.

It had an eerie and uncanny quality, that incessant throbbing of the drum at once monotonous and rapid, on one single note of hollow, macabre reverberation that no European drum could imitate. It pulsed in the air, booming menacingly as though close at hand, and yet he knew from

experience that it was a mile or more distant, that if he were to stalk the source of the sound it would get soft and more vague the nearer he approached, baffling him by ceasing to indicate the direction of its origin in a lulled murmur that would seem to come from all quarters at once —while, all the time, at a distance it was as loudly heard as before.

The acoustics of it was one of those mysteries, real enough some of them, which the savage holds yet from his white conqueror. Often enough had he heard it reverberating through the African jungle, the invocation of the Juju-man to hidden rites of diabolic worship—ineradicable in the negro-soul ; carried from the forests of the Congo to reappear as Voodoo beyond the Atlantic—where, in a climax of grotesquely horrible, self-maddened excitement, the white cock, or less innocently a stolen child, is sacrificed with a bedabblement of blood to propitiate the darker powers.

It was full of a weird and primitive suggestion that exasperated the nerves and played upon deeps in the mind. Listening to it, he could believe that story of the West Indian negro regiment where the men, commencing in mere idle amusement to drum in the traditional fashion upon empty biscuit tins, were seized and swept by the frenzy they unwittingly invoked to the massacre of their officers. He could imagine now, in the depths of that African jungle, the mass of black figures, illumined by the torches and the fire, swaying and crooning in a trance-like fascination, while the crudely bedevilled witch-doctor danced indefatigably before the crouching negro who thrummed softly with his fingers on the drumhead the note that swelled as its vibrations passed to more distant air. The savage enemy, undefeated by his last foiled attack on the stockade—there had been one hot half-hour when it was touch and go—was invoking supernatural aid for the next attempt.

Not only to him did that diabolical drumming fill the night with something mysteriously malevolent, permeating it as with awakened evil spirits. The men at the cooking fires—ceasing to laugh and jabber, with gesticulation and

happy teeth-flashing grins from ear to ear, over their reminicences of the great killing they had perpetrated at sundown—had relapsed into an uneasy silence, were evidently listening, even as he was. Who knew what superstitious response was stirring in their primitive souls, savages themselves a few months back, savages still under the European uniform? He had half a mind to break the spell by putting them through their drill, desisted because, at this unwonted hour, it was to acknowledge uneasiness in himself.

A tall man, older than he, but similarly dressed in shirt, breeches and revolver holster, emerged from the darkness into the lamplight of the tent. The officer looked up.

"Well, doc, what's the bulletin to-night?"

There was a worried crease between the older man's eyebrows as he took the other camp-chair at the table.

"Three more of 'em down," he said curtly. "I hope those brutes haven't been playing Juju tricks with the water. I've given it another dose of chloride—but chloride's no use against poison."

The officer frowned also.

"That reduces us to less than 50 per cent. And we can't be relieved for a week at least—there's the message." He passed across a piece of paper. "A runner came in half-an-hour ago."

The doctor read it, his lips tight, his brows corrugated. The overhead lamplight emphasised by its shadows the strength of character manifest in his lean features.

"Doesn't look very cheerful, does it?" he commented, as he passed back the message. "Well, we'll hang out."

"We'll hang out, of course," replied the officer, "so long"—he looked at the doctor—"so long as nothing happens to you or me. Take care of yourself, doc. It isn't only a fighting man's job. I can't tackle this confounded sickness. It beats me. It's not the ordinary kind of thing."

The doctor shook his head.

"No—it isn't, that's a fact. But I think I've got it in hand. Two or three seem better, and no one has died since yesterday. But,"—he glanced keenly at his comrade —"you keep yourself fit, too, Bull, my lad. This is

distinctly a fighting man's job as well, and that's not my line. You're not looking any too bright to-night."

"It's that confounded drum!" the younger man burst out in exasperation. "It's getting thoroughly on my nerves!" The distant drum still throbbed, uncannily menacing, filling the air with its macabre reverberations.

The doctor nodded.

"I wish to God we could stop it. It's making the men jumpy. They're muttering all sorts of things about Juju spells to each other. That little scrap this evening cheered them up, but the effect is wearing off. They're talking now about that confounded witch-doctor last night and explaining to each other that, of course, they couldn't hit him. It *was* a bit of a miracle, at that close range. I hope he doesn't do another little Devil-dance outside the stockade again to-night. It isn't good for black men's nerves—or ours either, for that matter."

"I hope he does come," said Bull, grimly. "He'll get the surprise of his life."

He clapped his hands sharply together and a black soldier-servant came in with the supper.

The two men addressed themselves to the stew of bully-beef, washed down with whiskey and water. They talked little, but it was evident that they were glad of each other's company in the immense loneliness of their isolation in this African jungle swarming with hostile savages. To have a table-companion of their own race was a luxury sufficiently rare to both to be gratefully appreciated. Their natural tacturnities accorded well together. Each respected the other as a man who knew his job. They had not yet been cooped up long enough in each other's unrelieved society for the emergence of those petty irritations which develop into hostility and hate.

They did not even know each other very well. Dr. Steevens was comparatively new to the service, had been sent up-country to deal with an epidemic which was decimating the natives. He had got into conflict with the witch-doctors—principally over the little matter of burying the dead under the hut-floor and the ceremonial sniffing

of the corpse—and the witch-doctors had won. They had persuaded the disease-smitten, panic-stricken natives that the sole cause of the epidemic was the presence of white men among them. Dr. Steevens had only got into Bull's station, garrisoned by a detachment of native rifles, by the skin of his teeth.

Since then, for the best part of a week, both men had been perpetually alert, night and day, in a desperate defence tragically complicated by the outbreak of sickness in the post. Both men were feeling the strain more than they would have confessed. Without either one of them, the post was doomed.

Their supper was interrupted by a sudden barbaric din, startling in its propinquity, the feverish thudding of native drums—not the uncanny reverberation of the Juju-drum, though that still continued, temporarily half-heard, from the distance—but drums close at hand, that beat in a quick monotony of rhythm to the weirdly-lugubrious wailing of native horns, to wild cries and howlings beyond the stockade. The black soldiers jumped up from their cooking-fires, stood petrified in attitudes of alarm.

"There's that confounded witch-doctor again"! ejaculated Steevens.

"Wait!" said Bull, with a grim smile.

For a moment or two longer the clamour continued—and then it was shattered by the ragged crash of a rifle volley, repeated again and again at the other side of the stockade. Shrieks and yells started horridly through the night air in the brief intervals between the volleys, while the soldiers, at sharp words of command, sprang to their fighting stations. There was an immediate multiplication of irregular detonations, of excited, exulting yells, of half-heard screams, while rifle-flashes flickered like petty lightnings in the darkness beyond the tent.

The doctor glanced across at Bull, who went on with his supper like a general calmly confident that his orders are being obeyed, his battle efficiently conducted for him. He smiled at the questioning glance.

"Ambushed him!" he shouted through the din. "Told you I had a little surprise for him!"

For a minute or two longer the pandemonium of deafeningly close rifle-fire, shrieks, screams and yells, continued at full height, then it faded, died away, with one or two last shots, into silence. The foot-crunch of a squad of marching men approached the tent, stopped abruptly at a native-mouthed vociferation of " 'Alt ! " A gigantic negro, a sergeant's stripes on the sleeve of his uniform, stood framed in the opening of the tent. He grinned, his protruding lips splitting over white teeth from ear to ear, as he saluted and made his report in his uncouth language.

The officer nodded, satisfied, answered him with facile proficiency in the native tongue.

The sergeant turned, shouted to his squad the English words of command.

" Quick—march ! . . . 'Alt ! "

In the triangle of the tent-opening appeared, his arms behind his back, and held by two scared-looking black privates, an immense and fantastically bedizened negro. The great plumes upon his head added to his height, dwarfing his captors, and the grotesque paintings upon his face and body, down to the ceremonial skirt of coloured feathers crudely juxtaposed in mystic patterns, took from him the similitude of a man, gave him the appearance of a demon of a nightmare. He had been dancing a devil-dance of sorcery and the frenzy of the incantation was still on him. His eyeballs were still rolling like those of an epileptic and his mouth foamed over the paint which smeared his face.

The officer questioned him with a few sharply stern, guttural words. The Juju-man, lost in his trance-like diabolic ecstasy, did not answer. Only on a peremptory repetition of the question did his epileptically rolling eyes come down to the two white men as though he then first perceived them. His expression underwent a sudden change. His face contorted horribly, his eyeballs protruded from his head, he seemed about to speak—then burst, instead, into a horrid hysterical laugh of ghastly mirth.

Bull shouted at him angrily. But the maniac laughter did not cease. The negro shook with it as it came peal on peal from his painted mouth, hideously grotesque in an

unholy glee for which there was no visible occasion. Then, wrenching one arm free with convulsive strength, he pointed to between the two officers, rattled off some rapid excited gibberish, and burst again into diabolical and mocking laughter.

The officer's face set hard. He snapped out a curt order to the sergeant. The N.C.O. saluted, bellowed to his squad. The Juju-man was dragged away into the darkness. There was something blood-curdling, uncannily sinister in its unquenchable mockery, about that laugh which continued even after he had disappeared. It made the doctor shudder.

"You're going to shoot him?" he queried. Comparatively limited as was his knowledge of the language, he had understood his comrade's order.

"On the spot. I'll show 'em whether a witch-doctor can't be killed."

A minute later a volley crashed within the stockade.

"That's the end of him!" commented Bull, vindictively.

"What was that he said—when he pointed? I didn't catch it," asked the doctor, helping himself to some sweet biscuits out of the tin.

Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"Some raving nonsense. Said he saw a skull between us or something of the sort. Tried to put the wind up us—that's how they do it with their own kind—just suggestion. Expects us to pine away now, I suppose—or rather fly at each other's throats like lunatics. That's what he hinted at. Forget it!"

"It's a comment on our civilisation, isn't it?" remarked the doctor, "that there's substantially no difference between a Bond Street medium—when he's genuine—and that fellow. Both work themselves up into an auto-hypnotic frenzy where the subconscious mind runs riot."

"I suppose they do see things sometimes," said Bull, with indifference, searching carefully for a ginger-nut among the biscuits in the tin. "There was a Highlander chap in my regiment during the war and he used to see shrouds round fellows who were going to get killed." He found the biscuit, looked for another. "Were *you* in the war, doc?"

" Yes," replied the doctor, with the curt abruptness of a man who does not wish to enter into a new turn of the conversation.

Bull glanced up at him under his eyebrows from the biscuit tin. He had met too many men with pasts in this God-forgotten country not to respect incomprehensible reticences when he got the hint. But he wondered suddenly what it was in the doctor's antecedents that made the war-period obnoxious to his memory—and, by extension, why it was that a clever fellow like him, abnormally sober, should bury himself in the African bush. For three years before this, on his own showing, he had been roving all over the waste places of the world, as though in a flight from civilisation. Some mystery about old doc, he thought. He looked an unhappy man, too, a man who goes about with a secret. He remembered suddenly that he had never seen him smile.

He voiced none of these thoughts, broke the doctor's tight-lipped silence with a resumption of the evidently harmless subject.

" I guess old Mumbo-Jumbo's decease has given our friends a nasty jolt," he said.

" Do they know ? " asked the doctor.

" They do by this time—I told them to cut off his head and pitch it over the stockade. One of their scouts has certainly picked it up."

" Pleasant country ! " commented the doctor.

" It's the devil's own habitation," said the other. " I've seen things here that almost make you believe in spells and witchcraft and all the rest of it. It's a country where something Satanic can get hold of a man. You can feel diabolic influences in the air. I can to-night." He shuddered.

" It's that confounded drum," said the doctor. " I was hoping it would leave off after that little incident." The drum, uncanny and subtly menacing, still continued to throb in their ears, maddening in its insistence.

" Not a chance ! They've mobilised half-a-dozen witch-doctors for a certainty—and they'll keep going till only a machine-gun 'll stop the frenzy they've worked up. We're

in for a hot time to-morrow, you can take my word for it."

The doctor filled his pipe, while the black soldier-servant cleared the table, left a bottle of whiskey and two mugs between them, and went out.

"Well," he said, with an apparent equanimity at variance with the strain evident in his eyes, "I'm glad I've got you here. You're the fellow to teach 'em a lesson!"

Bull was pouring out the whiskey.

"I don't want to throw bouquets about, but I'm glad I've got *you* here, doc. I shouldn't have had a dog's chance with this sickness."

"Just as well we're both here," agreed the doctor. "We'll call it Providence. Here's how!"

Bull lifted his mug also.

"Here's to the old country!" he said, and drank the toast. "Doc, why in heaven's name did you and I come to this cursed limbo of all wickedness?" He shuddered again. "It gives me the creeps to-night. I wish to God I could silence that infernal drum! I've been too long out here, I suppose. You know how fellows go black? I don't mind telling you—I have to fight it off sometimes. It sort of invades one. I'm almost as bad as a nigger when I listen to that drum—and I can't help listening to it. It gives me a funny sort of scared feeling—almost superstitious. As though those dancing Juju-men—I can see 'em—were really calling up evil spirits to wipe us out, as they think they are."

The doctor glanced at him keenly.

"Have a good go of quinine when you turn in to-night—and talk about something else now," he suggested.

Bull poured himself out some more whiskey.

"Talk about the old country, shall we?" he said, taking a deep drink. "Lord, doc! can you imagine it—at this moment? Can you see 'em all, men and women in evening-dress, and the lights in Piccadilly Circus? There they go, the lucky brutes, not in the least realising how lucky they are—not a thought for you and me in the depths of this cursed jungle! Jove, doc, why aren't we there with a

little woman on our arm—going to a theatre perhaps. Can't you see the electric signs blazing down the streets? There are other things, too—things other chaps seem to get naturally just as if it were their right. I'd give a lot sometimes to be seeing the kids off to bed in the nursery, with—with someone I used to know, poor little woman! She'd have loved 'em, too!" He sighed. "Were you ever married, doc?"

"Yes." The monosyllable was as curt as that which acknowledged his war-service.

Bull forbore to probe. He looked down a vista of his own memory and sighed again.

"I never married. But it wasn't my fault—nor hers either. Fate plays some fiendish little tricks on us poor mortals—catches you sometimes in a trap that seems specially laid for you. Don't you think so, doc?"

He stared out into the darkness beyond the tent where the black soldiers had settled again around their fires. The uncannily sinister throbbing of the distant drum filled the silence unbroken by any response from his comrade. He resumed on an impulse to talk that would help him to forget the spell that caught him when he listened.

"Well, I've known what a woman can be to a man, and that's something. But it was a funny business—with a rotten ending. D'you think a woman can love two men at once, doc?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"I've given up trying to understand women," he said.

"Yes. I suppose you're right. But this one haunts me—I feel I *ought* to understand her. Sometimes—you know what a man gets like when he's alone in this infernal country—I catch myself talking to her out loud. She's always with me—I have to prevent myself from believing in ghosts sometimes. I suppose it's because—well, I don't see why a man should be ashamed to confess it," he spoke almost with defiance, "because I loved her as I've never loved a woman before or since. And she loved me—I'm sure of it."

"What was wrong, then?" queried the doctor from out of preoccupations of his own.

" She was married. It was in 1916. I'd got pipped and was home on convalescent leave. I met her quite by accident and—you know all sorts of funny things happened during the war—I don't think there was a soul from first to last who had the least idea we even knew each other. When we met we vanished into a secret world of romance. The whole thing used to bewilder me."

" Why ? "

" Well—I could never make out her attitude to her husband. She wouldn't even speak of him if she could help it. He was at the front, hadn't had leave for months. She was afraid of him, I could see that—but that wasn't all. I had a sort of feeling that she loved him, too—in a different sort of way from loving me. With me, she just went mad. And then afterwards I'd catch her crying, and then she'd kiss me and try to laugh and tell me she'd given up everything in the world for me so wasn't it obvious she loved me. But when I talked of arranging a divorce so that we could get married, she'd just sit miserable and silent and look at me as though she hated me. It was the end of it that fairly baffled me—has baffled me ever since."

" What happened ? " said the doctor.

" Well, in due course I had orders to go out again and the night before I went she had a wire to say her husband was coming home on leave. She was scared stiff. Of course, I consoled her—told her I should surely come back to her, as I had every intention of doing if I were alive. There was only one woman in the world for me. She pretended to believe it—gave me a charm that she said would always keep me safe." He twiddled a ring on his finger. " She'd had it blessed—she was a Catholic—said that wherever I was, if I remembered her with love good influences would protect me. I've had so many near shaves since, that I've almost come to believe it—who else should I think of in a tight corner ? She had no fear for me, I'm sure of that. That doesn't explain the end."

" What was the end ? "

" I didn't know myself till I was in the trenches a day or two later. We got the newspapers there, you remember. I was looking through one of them when her name caught

my eye. It was the report of the inquest." He stopped, bit on his pipe-stem. "She had poisoned herself—before her husband's return. He told the coroner that he knew no reason for it."

He poured more whiskey into his mug, drank it down. The sinister booming throb of the drum still filled the little silence. He stared in front of him, unaware of the doctor's eyes upon him.

"What was her name?" asked the doctor quietly.

"Daphne." He answered mechanically, lost in his thoughts.

"I mean her surname?"

"Her surname?" He spoke still with his thoughts far away. "Stee——" The name, unfinished as it was, awoke something in him. He switched round to the doctor, his eyes staring, gasping with a sudden horror he would not yet admit to credibility. "Why—Good God, man! . . . it wasn't . . . you're not——?"

The doctor was looking at him with a face that seemed carved in stone, his hand on his revolver holster.

"Yes," he said, with grim succintness.

"My God!" said the other, appalled. "My God!"

The macabre reverberations of the insistent drum seemed to emphasise the diabolic irony of it.

"You're the man I've been looking for for six years," said the doctor in a slow, quiet voice, charged full with deadly menace. "It happened just as you say—she was dying when I got home—and she confessed everything—everything except your name."

His fingers unfastened the strap of his holster, while his eyes held the other.

The man seemed oblivious to his peril. "My God!" he said. "And I never connected the names! I never guessed!"

"Nor I," said the doctor, grimly. "But there it is. Your friend the witch-doctor saw something after all." He pulled out his weapon with a quick jerk.

Quick as he was, the other was as quick. A pair of revolvers confronted each other over that table. They looked into each other's unflinching eyes, each man's features

sternly set, elemental hostility surging up in each. Neither quailed. The imminence of death, sardonically dooming both, filled the little tent like an atmosphere. The maddening throb of that uncanny drum went on incessantly.

It was the officer who spoke.

"Steevens! Before God! it was you who killed her—not I. She was afraid of you."

"You lie!" said the doctor. "She loved me—before you soiled her soul. She died loving me. Go down to hell with that ringing in your ears!" His revolver pointed straight at the other's heart. The throbbing of that accursed drum, where foam-mouthed, grotesquely-bedevilled Juju-men danced for the weaving of their spells, quickened suddenly in a paroxysm of rapid rhythm, as though incantations mounted to a climax. Outside in the night a sentry challenged. Neither heard him.

"Move your trigger-finger and I fire!" said the officer. "We go together! And before we go, I tell you that it was I she loved. She was afraid of you. Without you, she would have been my wife at this minute."

"Have you nothing better to say?" commented the doctor, grimly. "No prayers? I'm going to shoot you like a dog."

"I shoot the same instant," said the other. "I want to kill you every bit as much as you want to kill me. I've sworn it to her ghost a thousand times."

There was a pause.

"What are you waiting for?" said the officer.

"I don't want it to be too sudden," replied the doctor. "I've lived for this moment for six long years."

"It's mutual," was the grim reply.

They sat and looked at each other across that table, each conscious of the little, round black muzzle below the level of their gaze focussed into each other's eyes, alert for the flicker in them that would fractionally precede the fatal double stab of flame.

It was the officer who spoke again.

"Steevens," he said, "I'm not quitting—but will you listen to something?"

The doctor's face did not soften.

" Be brief," he said.

The officer spoke over the unwavering level of his revolver.

" Steevens," he said, " we're both going we don't know where. We don't know what we're going to see—or whether we're going to see anything at all. Shall we look at her face for perhaps the last time—both of us ? "

The doctor's grim features twitched.

" It's fair play ? " he queried. " No tricks ? "

" D'you think I'd soil her memory ? " said the other angrily.

Without taking his eyes from his adversary, he felt with his left hand inside his shirt, extracted a small photograph from some inner pocket. Then, suddenly reckless, he ignored his peril, gazed at it.

" God bless her ! " he murmured, and kissed it.

" Drop that ! " The doctor's voice was harsh.

Bull flung the photograph on the table.

" I give you the same privilege," he said. " You loved her too. Twenty seconds."

The doctor looked at it, made as if to touch it, drew his hand back.

" I don't kiss that photograph," he said, with a catch in his throat.

Bull shrugged his shoulders.

" Ten seconds."

The doctor took his gaze from the photograph.

" Ten seconds it is." He levelled his revolver again. Outside,the sentry challenged once more, unheard by either. They sat in a silence filled only by that infernal reverberating tattoo. " By God ! he ejaculated in exasperation, " that drum will drive me mad ! "

Bull flung his revolver with a crash upon the table.

" It's driven us both mad ! " he exclaimed. " Raving mad ! "

The doctor indicated the abandoned weapon with the muzzle of his own.

" Two seconds to pick it up," he said, sternly. " It may as well be both of us."

"No!" cried Bull, jumping up from his seat as though to fling off a spell. "Do you realise what we're doing, Steevens? *We're throwing away the post!*"

The doctor looked at him, lowered his revolver reluctantly.

"My God!" he said, appalled by this larger issue he had forgotten.

Bull smiled grimly at him.

"Steevens," he said, "I'd die happy if I had put a bullet through you—but if you go, if either of us go, I wouldn't give tuppence for the chance of this post. We can't do it."

The doctor continued to stare at him. The drum throbbed madly.

"And I've waited six years—six years of hell—for this minute," he said.

Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"There's time enough," he replied. "That charming Juju-man spoke the truth. There's a dead woman between you and me. When we're relieved we'll settle our account."

"You mean," said Steevens, with bitter incredulity, "that you and I are to sit here side by side for a week—and keep our hands off each other?"

The grim smile came again on Bull's hard face.

"Just that," he agreed. "It's what the newspaper johnnies call shouldering the white man's burden."

The doctor jumped up.

"No!" he cried. "I'm not going to be tricked like this! One of us might be killed. I haven't waited six years for this minute to be baulked now! You have still your two seconds to pick up your gun—or die like a coward!"

Bull looked at him coldly. With on effort only observable from a tightening of his lips, he cleared his senses from the confusion of that incessantly throbbing drum, fought back, just in time, a demon that leaped in him to run amok. It was not good to call Bull a coward.

"Very well, then, doctor. Just go outside and shoot or poison your patients first. They can't fight for their lives, and it's torture for them in the morning when the post

falls. They're your pigeon. We'll quit our job as decently as we can."

The doctor wavered.

"Bull," he said, "that's fiendish of you."

"Not at all," was the grim reply. "I'm saving what I can of your professional honour. Run along and kill your patients. I'm ready for you when you've done it."

The doctor sank down again into his camp-chair, hid his face in his hands.

"You know I can't!" he said, miserably.

Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"There you are!" he commented. "We happen to be white men."

Steevens looked up with a haggard face.

"We stick it," he said. "Until we're relieved. And then, God help you!"

At that instant, with a slight zip of pierced convas, a spear came hurtling through the tent, stuck quivering in the table. It was the attack.

The next half-hour was a wild chaos of surging tumult, of incessant detonations, of screams and yells in barbaric triumph or death-agony, a phantasmagoria of sudden perils where black men fought like demons in the light of blazing thatch. Twice Bull saved the doctor from a deadly spear-thrust by a timely shot. In an exultant release of all his faculties, he was everywhere at the point of most pressing danger, dominating the conflict, rallying his men, half-overwhelmed in the first rush, to a steady regularly-volleying discipline that beat back the enemy yard by yard. At last, by a superhuman effort where he killed hand to hand to protect the team hastily setting up the tripod, dragging out the ammunition-belts from the boxes, he got a machine-gun on to the flank of that mob of fanatic savages who had killed the sentries and swarmed into the stockade.

That machine-gun settled the business. Ruthlessly served, it rattled out annihilation. A minute or two of it—and the remnant scrambled over the stockade and fled.

Bull re-established his guards, repaired his defences, counted his casualties, and cleared the ground from the corpses that encumbered it. His men grinned happily as

they showed him another fantastically-bedizened Juju-man among the slain.

These things took him some time. When he returned to the tent he found Steevens there before him, helping himself to a drink with hands still blood-smeared from his surgery. The doctor looked up as he entered, drew himself erect, took a step towards him, probing him with deep-set eyes.

" You saved my life," he said.

Bull smiled queerly.

" What did you expect ? "

The doctor turned and poured from the whiskey-bottle into the other mug.

" Have a drink ? " he offered curtly.

Bull reached for the mug, hesitated.

" It's unusual, isn't it ? " he said, " in the circumstances."

The doctor looked at him.

" Have you got that photograph ? "

Bull felt for it, produced it. Steevens took it, tore it up into small fragments.

Bull uttered an angry exclamation.

The doctor held out his hand.

" I've torn up—— " he checked for a word—" the circumstances. Will you drink ? "

Bull gripped the outstretched hand.

" Proud to," he said, simply.

With that assumption of nonchalance over deeper feelings typical of their breed, the two men raised their mugs silently to each other.

They listened to the challenges of visiting rounds. The last one ceased. Both were suddenly conscious of the silence.

" Thank God," said Bull, " that confounded drum has stopped ! "

ON THE BOULEVARD

ON THE BOULEVARD

THERE is no spectacle more chastening to the male pride of intellect than that of a number of quite clever men attempting to explain the feminine riddle to each other. This cynical reflection is not mine. It was murmured to me by Dicky Morrice, from the cloud of tobacco-smoke which enveloped his philosophic taciturnity as he sat cross-legged, Turk-fashion, on the divan in McFadden's studio.

That long sentence was an unusual conversational effort for Morrice, and someone overheard it in a sudden pause in the conflict of generalisations evoked by a chance reference to poor young Montgomery's affair.

"Let's have your theory, then, O Solomon!" said a perceptibly aggrieved voice.

"Theory? Heaven forbid!" replied Morrice, as he refilled his immense, drooping briar. "I have no theories about women. Human life is not long enough. I am modestly contented with a collection of observational data. If I should happen to remember them, together with earlier collections, in the interval between one incarnation and the next, I propose to amuse myself by trying to fit them together. It should occupy quite a considerable period of eternity."

McFadden laughed.

"You may be otherwise engaged," he said, "but let's have some of your observational data!"

Morrice sucked thoughtfully at his briar for a moment.

"Well, you're a mighty clever lot of fellows," he said, "and you know all about women. I'll give you a little study in the eternal riddle, and we'll see what you make of it."

He collected his thoughts for a moment or two of long, deliberately-blown puffs of tobacco-smoke. The chatter of the studio ceased. Morrice was one of those silent fellows who, when they speak, are listened to.

"It was last year, while I was still in Paris," he began, a little clumsily. "I was sitting one evening outside the café at the corner of the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, watching the crowd stream along the boulevard. You know that crowd—it's one of the most fascinating spectacles in the world. As I sat there over my half-empty coffee-cup—forgive these details, but I want to visualise the scene—it was as if a procession of souls passed by me for judgment. The ever-renewed faces that turned instinctively to the glare of light from the café were lit up by it with a cruelly ironic insistence of character of which they themselves were ignorant.

"You can see the types, of course—the well-to-do *bourgeois* in a series of plump convexities from cheeks to abdomen; the ultra-chic young men who are nevertheless caricatures of the elegance they aim at; those other young men in immense black sombreros and loose ties who have strayed from the Boul' Mich', the cadaverous concavity of their pale faces precociously hirsute, consumed with anxiety to be noticed by the world if only for their eccentricity; the old men, carefully preserved, who pass slowly, sending the eye of a decrepit vulture roving over the women in the café; the hawkers who stop, pathetically mute, dangling their toys over the little tables, while their hungry eyes search for clients; the somewhat furtive policemen; the newsboys who yell unintelligibly as they dodge under the arms of the promenading crowd—you know them as well as I do.

"And the women. You know that procession of women with faces that are painted masks varying from the grotesque crudity of blue-circled eyes and scarlet lips on a rice-white face to the delicate work of art that mimics, with ochre, the tint of a sun-kissed country-girl. One and all, their faces turn to the light of the café and their eyes—the eyes that made you hate or pity them—range over the customers at the little tables, some expertly, some with a

diffidence that may be only assumed, while they venture a half-smile of perfidious allurement. And you read in their eyes the hard, ugly avarice which is all that is left in their hearts, except perhaps for a worthless scoundrel who sits drinking away their earnings round the corner.

" In certain moods, there is no more cynically horrible spectacle in the world than this phantasmagoria of unsouled women, shamelessly or pathetically hawking a poisoned mockery of love, that moves nightly through the corrupted heart of Paris.

" I was in that mood, and some such thought was in my mind, when I suddenly found myself looking at a girl who passed slowly before the serried tables. Her eyes were on mine when I first knew that I was looking at her. Such eyes !—great dark orbs in an oval of a face that, innocent of paint, was set white and cold like marble. She looked at me with a fixed intensity, yet I could not be sure that she saw me. She looked like a somnambulist. But she moved with a self-conscious diffidence in her slow gait which distinguished her at once from the callous sisterhood who passed her. Without a certain native dignity her clothes would have appeared as poor as they really were. She stood out like a lily among weeds. Yet she was alone —on the boulevard—and the dinner-hour was long past.

" On a sudden, inexplicable impulse, I made a sign to her. She saw it—hesitated—then, with an obvious effort of courage, came and sat down beside me.

" ' You meant me to ? ' she queried, with a shy timidity unusual in such meetings. I could see that she was trembling.

" ' Certainly, mademoiselle,' I replied. ' What may I order for you ? '

" ' Coffee,' she said. ' Please.'

" ' Some cakes ? '

" A ghost of a smile came over the marble beauty of her face. ' *Je veux bien. Merci, monsieur.*'

" The coffee and the cakes were brought. Despite a quite apparent effort to control her appetite, she ate them ravenously.

" A suspicion flashed into me. I turned to her. When did you have your last meal ? ' I asked.

" ' Yesterday.' She seemed half-ashamed to make the admission.

" ' Why not tell me ? ' I said irritably. I was annoyed with her as with a child for being foolish. ' I asked you what I should order.'

" She looked up at me penitently, those great eyes in the pale oval of her face curiously sincere.

" ' *Pardon, monsieur,*' she said. ' You see, I—I didn't know. I—I am not accustomed—— '

" I rose from my chair, threw down money for the waiter.

" ' You can explain afterwards,' I said. ' Come and have something to eat.'

" I took her to the restaurant on the first floor over the café. It was deserted at this intermediate hour. In a few minutes she was spooning up her soup as a preliminary to the substantial meal I ordered for her. It did one good to see her eat. I watched her, without conversation, until she had finished. Not until she was peeling her final orange did I utter the question that had been waiting for utterance since I first set eyes on her.

" ' Now, my dear young lady,' I said severely. ' Perhaps you will be good enough to explain what you are doing on the boulevard ? It is obviously not your *métier.*'

" I felt like a father to her. In comparison, I was old enough.

" The white marble of her face, softened for a moment by the comfort of food and drink, hardened again. Then she ceded, perhaps out of gratitude, to the authority I assumed.

" ' I was looking for a man,' she said, and the brows over her great eyes contracted and her lips went thin.

" ' So much I guessed,' I said ironically. She flushed at my tone.

" ' One particular man," she elucidated, with an expression that puzzled me. ' I am sure to meet him on the boulevard sooner or later.'

" ' How long have you been looking for him ? '

" ' This is the first time.' She glanced at me. ' You guessed that too ? '

" ' Easily. . . . But who is he, this man you are looking for ? . . . An old '—I was going to say ' lover '—' friend of yours ? '

" ' I have never seen him, but when I do I shall know him.' She felt in her hand-bag, extracted a photograph, passed it to me. It was that of a young man, strikingly good-looking in an ascetic sort of way. ' His name is Boris Mirsky. You don't know him ? '

" ' No. . . . And when you do meet him ? '

" ' I shall kill him.'

" I caught a glimpse of a miniature automatic in her bag, as she replaced the photograph. The cool ferocity of this bald statement, coming as it did from the girlish beauty of that face, gave me a queer shock. She could not have been more than nineteen, and there was in her that nobility, that peculiar virgin purity which surrounds certain rare women with an aura which compels a reverential respect beyond explanation. She was a mystery that fascinated me. Clearly, she was not French.

" ' Will you tell me your name ? ' I asked.

" ' Vera Mikhailovna,' she answered, automatically almost, her dark eyes staring thoughtfully in front of her at some prospect I could not share.

" These Russian names always muddle me. ' Mikhailovna is not your surname ? ' I ventured.

" ' My father's name was Stapouloff,' she said.

" ' Was ? '

" ' He died the day before yesterday.' Tears came up in her great eyes.

" ' Is there no one else who—— ? ' I began.

" ' No one in all the world.' Her curt finality did not ask for pity.

" There was a little silence. The thought of this beautiful girl alone in Paris with that murderous purpose in her mind perturbed me strangely. Why did she want to kill this Boris Mirsky ? You know that feeling that you have been *sent* to help someone ? I leaned forward to her.

" ' My dear young lady,' I said, ' will you not grant me the privilege of a disinterested friend and confide in me ? '

" Her great eyes softened as she looked at me. ' I

believe you are a friend,' she said, ' just a friend and not—not . . .' she hesitated, pathetically hopeful.

" ' I am just a friend,' I assured her, ' nothing more. But I should like to help you, to put you on a better path than that of the boulevard.'

" She looked at me almost pityingly after a sudden resentment had gone out of her eyes.

" How should you understand ? . . . *Mon ami,* I did not go on the boulevard because—because I liked that—that horror. I had to force myself to it. But it seemed to me the only way.'

" ' Because you had no money ? ' I hazarded.

" She shrugged her shoulders, contemptuous of my obtuseness.

" ' I have no money, it is true,' she said. ' But not because of that. I have a sacred duty laid upon me. I sacrifice myself to it.'

" ' I don't understand,' I admitted. ' What duty ? '

" ' The duty of finding Boris Mirsky—and killing him.'

" I had never had any personal experience of the Slav temperament, but I remembered that a friend had told me that Russian girls had bewildered him from first to last ; they were neither moral nor immoral as you expected them to be ; they had an utterly different code never coincident with ours. This girl was obviously chaste to the marrow of her bones—yet she could deliberately betake her beauty to the boulevard on the hypothetical chance of meeting one particular man in the millions that throng Paris ! Only a Russian girl could have coldly conceived such a fantastic project.

" She was plainly not to be argued with in her present mood. I sought for further information.

" ' Why is it your sacred duty to kill this Boris Mirsky ? ' I asked.

" She hesitated as though judging whether I were worthy of her confidence, and then suddenly she gave it to me. Her eyes flashed sombrely as she began her story. It would take too long to give it in her own words, and in its broad outlines it was a simple story, not dissimilar to

that of hundreds of other Russian refugees in Paris at the present time.

"Her father was a general in the old Imperial army. Together with his son and daughter, he had managed to escape at the beginning of the Bolshevik terror. They arrived in Paris utterly penniless, and the old man had managed precariously to avoid starvation for himself and his daughter by doing translation work. The son became a cab-driver. During the war, he had been a major in one of the Guards regiments. In the same regiment, and his great friend from the time they were at the Military Academy together, was this Boris Mirsky.

"Mirsky, it seemed, was an 'intellectual,' one of those high-caste Russians who, before the Revolution, were for ever tortured by doubts of their right to the privileges they enjoyed. The Revolution, apparently, fired the magazine in him. He enthusiastically embraced the new order of things, and was one of those who assisted Kerensky in his efforts to reconstitute the army. Young Stapouloff fled.

"Some months later, leaving his father and sister to continue their struggle against starvation in Paris, the ex-major joined Denikin's ill-fated army in the south of Russia. They sent him up-country on some secret service mission, disguised, of course. As luck would have it, he ran into his old friend Boris Mirsky—and Mirsky, Spartan or merely a scoundrel, promptly denounced him. The local Extraordinary Commission shot him next day. But, somehow or other, he managed to send a message to his father giving the name of his betrayer.

"After that, old General Stapouloff lived on with only one hope and object in life—that he would survive until the Bolsheviks collapsed and he could return to Russia and take vengeance for his son upon the friend who had betrayed him. She mimicked him, with a realism that made me shudder, muttering to himself: 'Boris Mirsky! Boris Mirsky!'

"A week previous to that evening, old Stapouloff had been startled to see—of all unlikely people—young Boris Mirsky on the boulevard. He was on the other side of the street, apparently unconscious of the old man's proximity.

Old Stapouloff had darted across after him, blind to the traffic in his excitement—and a motor-car had knocked him down. He died a few days later in hospital, holding his daughter's hand and making her swear that she would not rest until she had tracked down her brother's murderer and exacted that vengeance which he begged from God even as his life went out.

" She had spent her last centime on that automatic.

" The grim precision of her recital gave me cold shivers as I listened to it. I had to glance at her exquisite and nobly beautiful face not to lose sympathy for her—and then I saw her as a kind of Charlotte Corday, sublimely ready to immolate herself for what she believed to be her duty.

" ' But you are sure it was Boris Mirsky ? ' I objected. ' Would he dare to come to Paris ? . . . Surely, ardent Bolsheviks are not welcomed by the French Government ? '

" ' My father could not have been mistaken,' she replied. ' He is probably here with false papers.'

" ' Even so, what chance have you of finding him ? ' I said. ' It is like looking for a needle in a haystack.'

" ' I shall find him,' she answered, grimly confident, ' sooner or later on the boulevard—and then I shall kill him ! '

" The idea of her indefinitely promenading the boulevard on this hopeless quest was unthinkably abhorrent to me. You know the way some girls have of making you feel they are like your sisters ? I felt like that. Something had to be done.

" ' Look here,' I said, inspired on the spur of the moment, ' when you looked at me outside the café and came across to me at that sign from me, you had a feeling that this was predestined—that I was to help you—didn't you ? ' It was the wildest of guesses on my part.

" She nodded her head gravely.

" ' Yes,' she said. ' I felt that.'

" ' And you feel absolutely confident that you will sooner or later meet this Boris Mirsky ? '

" ' I am sure of it ! ' she said with emphasis.

" ' Good ! If you feel instinctively certain that you will

meet him, then assuredly you *will* meet him.' Privately, I felt that nothing was less certain, but I assumed all the impressive sincerity I could. 'But will you admit the possibility that now you are not going the right way to meet him?'

"She looked at me, her confidence a little shaken.

"'You say you felt that I was *sent* to help you,' I went on quickly. 'I felt the same. I believe I was there to help you.'

"'Yes,' she breathed, almost to herself. 'Something told me that.'

"'That means, if it means anything, that in some way —I don't know—you will meet him through me—because you have followed my advice,' I continued. I felt almost ashamed to deceive her with this illusive hope—if, improbably, I met Boris Mirsky I meant merely to keep them as far apart as possible—but I remembered what I had read about the fatalism of the Slav and I played on it desperately. 'Will you follow that advice?'

"'Yes.' She looked, a rapt far-away expression in her eyes, like a nun listening to supernatural counsels.

"'Then you will abandon your absurd project. You will never meet him in that way. I feel sure of it.'

"An evident relief came into her pale, set face.

"'What must I do?'

"'Have you any means of support?' I asked.

"She shrugged her shoulders.

"'I might perhaps procure some lessons to give,' she said.

"I had another inspiration—saw a picture in that head —many pictures.

"'If you will come to my studio,' I said, giving her my card, 'and will pose for me, I can give you work—and introduce you to other artists who will be glad to paint you.'

"'You don't mean . . . ?' She hesitated apprehensively, blushed suddenly vivid in a curious alarm of modesty. What strange mixtures some women are! Half-an-hour earlier she had been walking the boulevard.

"I reassured her. She was not the type that makes a Venus or an allegorical nude. Her beauty was made to

shine mystically out of sombre brocades, a queen or saint, or both in one.

" ' Only the head—or the draped body,' I said.

" She smiled gratefully—and then suddenly looked at me with a last searching doubt.

" ' And I shall meet Boris Mirsky ? . . . You promise ? '

" I gestured my personal impotence.

" ' My dear child, we are but the vehicles of Fate,' I said equivocally.

" It satisfied her. I gave her a few francs to go on with and sent her home to the little *appartement* she had occupied with her father. As she disappeared into the interior of the long, green-and-white motor-bus, she gave me an almost joyous wave of the hand to reiterate our au revoir.

" Thank heaven I am old enough not to fall in love with every beautiful woman I meet. I was not in love with Vera Mikhailovna, but she had impressed me immensely, had evoked a very genuine concern. I felt that I was called upon—you know the lofty notions we get sometimes —to prevent a crime, not against Mr. Boris Mirsky—I did not care what happened to him—but against Vera Mikhailovna herself, and I felicitated myself on my happy scheme to keep her cloistered in comparative safety. I wonder what justification, altrustic or other, the pawn finds for itself as it is moved across the chess-board ? Fate probably keeps us in an illusion of independent motives from first to last of our lives.

" I had no such thoughts then. I was merely pleased with myself for my own cleverness, and I had no doubt that she would arrive at my studio the next morning. She did. You know that old studio of mine, high up on Montmartre ; Paris, silent at that distance, immense below one ? She came in radiant with the flush of the climb— she had economically walked all the way—like an angel who had joyously left behind her the sordidness of those depths, just to be guessed at from my window, where we had met in the hours of darkness.

" The sunlight fell upon her, touching her dark hair to a ruddy glint. Her beauty gave me a shock. I steeled myself against it, maintained myself in the attitude of the

altruistic friend. A man always feels instinctively whether he has a chance of awakening a woman's love. Smiling at me though she was, I knew she regarded me quite dispassionately, saw in me only a friend sent by Fate to help her on her road. At my time of life a man shuns those pangs of hopeless love he revelled in as a boy. I crushed out the little spark she struck in me, busied myself with my easel and palette, posed her for some trial sketches after a few perfunctory words. I was resolved to keep our relations on an unimpeachable basis.

" She was an excellent model, docility itself. The pure white oval of her face, with the great dark eyes pregnant with unfathomable thoughts, was an inspiration. I became absorbed in my work, forgot her identity, forgot the purpose that had brought her to me. At last I stopped for a rest-interval. She ventured to move, came across to me.

" ' Do you think it will be to-day that I shall meet him ? ' she said quietly, her appealing eyes upon me.

" Busied with my own thoughts, I only half-realised her words.

" ' Meet who ? ' I said, out of my preoccupation.

" ' Boris Mirsky.'

" Memory came back to me with an unpleasant jolt, but I affected a gravely smiling confidence.

" ' My dear child, who can hasten Fate ? We must have patience.' I tried to commit myself as little as possible. She smiled, quite satisfied.

" She certainly had patience. Day after day she came to the studio and sat for me ; day after day, in the intervals of repose, she speculated gravely whether this would be the day that she should meet Boris Mirsky. She showed me his photograph so often that I got to know his features as well as she herself. It gave me an uncanny feeling to be taken so completely at my word. Her great, dark eyes upon me, she looked like an antique prophetess, confident in the Fate subconsciously revealed to her. When she had gone, I had to persuade myself that she was but a child, that it was permissible to delude her for her own good.

" I found her work with other artists and she went gladly because, my agency still being ultimately responsible, every one of those other studios held the possibility of meeting him. Many if not most of those artists made love to her, of course. They might have saved themselves the trouble. She was, gravely smiling, immune to their cajoleries. She was, underneath her smile, so much the ascetic incarnation of that single, grim purpose that I often wished, in desperation, that she would fall in love with one of them, commit a folly. But her soul was ice.

" This went on for some weeks. I could devote but a fraction of my time to painting her as I was busy finishing off the last of my pictures for the Salon. One afternoon —you know how one troops round to one another's studios —a crowd of fellows came to see my lot before I sent them in. Vera Mikhailovna was there, grave and silent as usual, replying to the flirtatious sallies of the men only by that smile of the mouth in which her eyes did not participate. One of the crowd brought in a stranger, a Russian—Serge Bolensky, I think he called him. As I turned to shake hands with him, I had a shock. Fate had taken me at my word. It was the man of the photograph !

" Involuntarily, I glanced round to the girl. She also had perceived him—had recognised him. She sat motionless on the divan in the corner of my studio, those strange, dark eyes of hers fixed upon him. The Russian had not noticed her, surrounded as he was by the throng of excitedly talkative young men with whom he laughed. I made an occasion to pass close to her.

" ' It is he ! ' she whispered. On her lap she fingered the little black handbag which held the automatic.

" I did not know what to answer, could only temporise in a blind desire to stave off the catastrophe.

" ' Not here ! ' I whispered back to her warningly.

" She nodded, continued to sit and watch him as a cat does a mouse.

" In an agony of apprehension, I rejoined my guests, tried to laugh at their slangy witticisms. And at the back of my mind loomed the inevitable tragedy I was impotent to prevent. I racked my brains for some device that

should get him safely away, and could think of none. An eternity seemed to have elapsed when, by a piece of unexpected luck, the Russian excused himself by an appointment he had to keep and took his leave. With an immense relief, I watched him go out of the door. When all these people had departed, I would take good care not to let Vera Mikhailovna out of my sight.

" The next moment, I saw her rise from the divan, her beautiful white face as marble-like as that first evening I had seen it. Without a word, she went towards the door. I stood like a fool, paralysed and fascinated by her quiet deliberation, so significant to me alone in that room, unable to make a movement to withhold her. If ever in my life, Fate was a reality to me then. It was as if there was a spell upon me. I saw my opportunity slip away from me. Another moment, and she was gone.

" I waited, in terror of that revolver-shot upon the stairs which should suddenly hush the babel around me. Half-a-dozen of the fellows, quite unconscious, of course, of my preoccupation, were pulling me this way and that. The minutes passed—then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, I tore myself away from them, dashed down the staircase.

" There was no sign of Vera Mikhailovna or the Russian —not even in the street from end to end. They had vanished utterly.

" I was trembling like a murderer myself when I went upstairs again to rejoin my friends. I don't know how I joked with them. The day passed, terribly slow, without those sudden tidings I from moment to moment expected. That evening, desperate with anxiety, I went round to her wretched little *appartement*. The *concierge* informed me that she had not been back since she left in the morning.

" The next day, contrary to her usual regularity, there was no sign of her. I waited all day in suspense. That evening I went again to her *appartement*. She had not been back at all. I bought every newspaper I could lay hands on, scanned them feverishly for the probably quite insignificant lines which would announce the tragedy I was certain of. There was not a hint of it.

" The day following was likewise a blank I filled in with a tortured imagination, cursing myself for that foolish interference which had brought about exactly what I wished to avoid, visualising Vera Mikhailovna arraigned for murder or lying dead by her own hand. Neither that day nor the next had she returned to her home. She had vanished as from off the earth. The newspapers were silent, reported no tragedy that even remotely resembled the one I could have written for them. I dared not go to the police, lest I should precipitate the worst. Her deed done—I had no doubt of that—she was perhaps in hiding.

" A whole week went by—and then I suddenly ran into her on the main boulevard. She tried to avoid me, but I held her.

" ' For God's sake,' I said, ' tell me what has happened ! '

" She looked at me strangely, seemed about to explain, and then stopped herself. ' Come with me,' she said.

" Not any sort of reply could I get from her as she led me to a street just behind the boulevard, close to the Folies Bergères. She turned into a house and I followed her up interminable flights of stairs. At last, at the very top, she opened a door and we entered a large, untidy room. In one corner was a couch and blanket on which somebody evidently had been sleeping. The little black handbag which held her automatic lay upon it. Just beyond the couch another door, now closed, led into a further room.

" ' Tell me ! ' I implored. ' Have you killed him ? '

" She put her finger to her lips : ' Sh'h ! ' I stared at her in bewilderment as she went softly to the other door, opened it and peeped in.

" ' Is that you, Marie ? ' said a man's voice faintly from that further room.

" ' Yes,' she answered from the doorway. ' I have brought a friend to see you—the artist, Monsieur Morrice, whose studio you visited.'

" She looked at me with an expression that completely baffled me. ' Would you like to see him ? ' she said.

" ' Certainly,' I replied, my curiosity roused to the highest pitch.

" I entered the room, and Vera Mikhailovna withdrew,

shutting the door gently upon me. In the bed was a man, my visitor to the studio—obviously very ill. He had an interesting face, haggard though it was, oddly attractive as he smiled at me. Despite or because of the grim story I knew about him, there was a decided fascination in the man's personality.

" ' Well, my friend,' I said with an assumption of cheerfulness, ' what is the matter ? '

" ' It's this cursed influenza,' he replied. (Paris was in the grip of an epidemic just then.) ' If it had not been for Marie I should have died.'

" ' Marie ? ' I echoed, puzzled.

" ' Marie Bakunin—the Russian girl who was at your studio. She ran after me as I went downstairs, and introduced herself. It seems she knew some friends of mine in Russia. There was a taxi standing just outside when we arrived at the street, and I offered to take her back to her *appartement*. We got in together, and—you know how suddenly influenza comes on ?—as we were on the way, I felt myself ill, very ill. I had had a shiver or two before coming to your studio. So Marie insisted that I should come back here—and I was so ill that she stayed and nursed me. She has been here ever since.'

" ' She has nursed you ? ' I repeated stupidly. My bewildered brain could not find the key to this mystery.

" ' Like the angel she is ! ' said the sick man. ' Monsieur,' he added gravely, but with a feverish sparkle in his eyes, ' I never knew that a woman could be such a miracle. To that chance visit to your studio I shall owe the happiness of my life. She almost makes me believe in God ! '

" I stared at him speechlessly.

" ' Have you never been in love ? ' he asked, with a peculiar smile.

" I could stand no more of this. Using the excuse of his weak state, and promising to visit him again, I left him and rejoined Vera Mikhailovna in the outer room.

" She was waiting for me, that inscrutable expression on her marble face, her eyes a mystery I probed in vain with mine.

" ' It was not he after all ? ' I said. ' Not Boris Mirsky ? '

" Her reply was as hard-toned as her face.

" ' Yes,' she said simply. ' It is Boris Mirsky.'

" ' I don't understand,' I said. I was indeed utterly bewildered. ' What happened ? '

" ' *Mon ami,*' she replied, ' you would never understand.'

" ' Let me try.' I appealed to her. ' He does not know who you are ? '

" ' No. . . . I wanted to get him away from your studio without alarming him. You told me not to do it there, you remember. I pretended to be a Marie Bakunin who knew some people called Bolensky. There was a taxi passing along the street and we got in together—to go to my rooms. On the way, he was taken suddenly ill: I noticed that he had fever when he first entered your studio.' She stopped, looked at me. ' Could you kill a sick man, *mon ami ?* '

" I shrugged my shoulders, made a gesture of inability to say.

" ' I could not,' she went on. ' He was so ill that he scarcely understood what I said to him. I wanted Boris Mirsky to understand, fully understand, before I killed him in all the fullness of life as my brother was killed. So I told the taxi to come straight here, and I put him to bed. I stayed with him, so as not to let him again out of my sight.''

" ' But you have nursed him—like an angel, he tells me.'

" The strangest expression flitted over her face, her lips quivered.

" ' I would not let him die—die like an innocent man in his bed,' she said, and her eyes turned away from me.

" ' And when he is well ? '

" The eyes came round to me again, strange, defiant.

" ' When he is well, I shall kill him, and '—her eyes burned at me—' then kill myself ! '

" I was tactful enough not to refer to him.

" ' Kill yourself ? ' I repeated. I thought I saw a chance, now that she realised her desperate situation after such a crime, to dissuade her from her obsession.

" ' Because I love him ! If you *must* know ! ' she threw at me, and suddenly sank down to the couch and buried her face in her hands.

" The irony of it appalled me. Love was not a word Vera Mikhailovna would use lightly. I did not know what to say, but I had to break the awful silence where she sat shaking with soundless sobs, her face hidden.

" ' What is he doing here—this Mirsky ? ' I asked, just to say something.

" ' Espionage,' she replied mechanically, without looking up. ' I went through his papers. They are here.' She made a blind gesture which indicated the interior of the couch.

" ' A curious parallel ! ' I said automatically, without thinking. ' Your brother—— ' I stopped, could have bitten off my tongue for this stupid reminder. My business was to get her away from here—to warn Mirsky, facilitate his escape.

" She looked up, stared at me through a long minute of silence.

" ' Yes, my friend,' she said at last slowly, ' you spoke truly that first evening. You are indeed the vehicle of Fate ! '

" ' What do you mean ? ' I asked, vaguely alarmed. ' I don't understand.'

" ' How should you understand ? ' she answered, her smile contemptuously tolerant. ' You are only an unconscious vehicle.'

" I humoured her.

" ' Very well then, Vera Mikhailovna—an unconscious vehicle, but one that would wish well to you if it could. Now, I want you to do me a favour—I can't get on with that unfinished head of you. Mirsky cannot move from here in his present condition. I want you to come back to the studio with me now.'

" Her eyes probed me. Then a slow smile came on her lips. " ' I will come back with you, *mon ami*, if you will allow me to perform an errand on the way. I have something I must do.'

" ' Where ? ' I asked.

" ' At the Prefecture of Police.'

" ' The Prefecture of Police ? '

" She smiled again at my suspicion, annulled it.

" ' Serge Bolensky has no *permis de sejour*,' she said, quietly.

" ' Very well,' I agreed. ' But come at once—or the light will be gone.'

" ' *Tout de suite!* ' she said. ' Wait here a moment for me.'

" She went into the further room where Boris Mirsky lay helpless, closed the door after her.

" I waited. I heard the faint sound of voices, too muffled by the closed door for articulation to be distinguished. Suddenly, a louder tone made me start. Was it my excited imagination—or did I hear, just perceptible, the names ' Mirsky '—' Stapouloff ' from behind that door ? I went to it softly, tried the handle. It was locked. I stood there trembling, trying with all my faculties to distinguish words in that murmur from the other side. ' Mirsky—Mirsky—Mirsky ! ' Surely I heard them in her voice—caught an answering ' Stapouloff ' uttered by the man ! Or was it my fancy, disordered by apprehension ? Before I had decided, I heard the key turn in the lock. I stepped back from the door.

" Her appearance reassured me. She was perfectly calm, her pale face utterly emotionless, her movement as she closed the door behind her merely the precise care of a conscientious nurse.

" ' I am ready,' she said. She had not removed her hat when she came in with me. We went down those interminable flights of dingy stairs together, found a taxi in the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre.

" I was grateful for the speed of that taxi which whirled us madly through the streets, after the manner of Parisian taxis, with an imminent accident barely shaved at every minute. I could not too quickly get away from the morbid atmosphere of that upper room. We did not exchange a word. I was filled with a sense of the bitter, subtle ironies of life. I had wished that she might fall in love ! I looked at her. The thoughts behind that beautiful face, which stared rigidly out of the window of the cab, were beyond my divination—and I reverted to my own, wondering if there is in reality such a thing as a Fate of which we

are the puppets. But once, when I glanced at her, I saw one great tear rolling slowly down her pale cheek.

"We arrived. You know that gloomy Prefecture of Police, close to Notre Dame? She jumped out of the cab.

"'Wait here for me,' she said. A moment later she had disappeared through its uninviting portals.

"I waited on the pavement, while the taxi-clock ticked up the fare, for half-an-hour perhaps—it seemed an eternity. But, knowing the little ways of the Prefecture, I was resigned to remain there indefinitely.

"She appeared at last, as unexpectedly as a long-waited-for person always does. I thought I had never seen her look more beautiful as she came across the pavement to me, erect in that graceful dignity which was peculiarly hers. The thought of Mirsky came into my mind. What manner of man was he—of all men!—to have awakened love in the heart of this noble creature with the exquisite pale face? A sudden, absurd jealousy sprang up in me. Love with her would be no mere sensual romance. It would be a boundless adventure of the soul. She smiled at me, a strange little smile.

"'It is finished,' she said. 'I thank you, *mon ami*.' She held out her hand as if to say good-bye.

"'Finished?' I echoed, at a loss to understand the stressed significance of her tone.

"'I have denounced him.'

"I stood speechless, incredulous of my comprehension. She had denounced him to the police! She still held out her hand.

"'Adieu!' she said.

"I looked into her eyes, had one glimpse of stoic tragedy that will haunt me all my life. Then she sprang into the taxi, cried to the driver an address I failed to catch. I made to follow her, but she stopped me with a gesture of the hand. '*Je vous en prie!*' she said, in an accent that compelled obedience. The cab whirled away, swung round the corner, left me standing, staring at a vision of the man she loved, lying doomed and impotent in his bed."

Morrice knocked out his pipe with an air of finality.

"What happened to him, then?" queried McFadden.

"To Mirsky? . . . What does happen to spies who are caught? I don't know. They vanish," replied Morrice sententiously.

"And the girl?" said someone else. "Did she kill herself?"

"The next morning among my letters," said Morrice, "there was one from her. Just a scrap of paper with the words, 'To die is too easy.' Nothing more, except the signature, 'Vera.'"

"And you never saw her again?"

Morrice looked up from refilling his pipe.

"Some months later I was walking along the boulevard just by the *Matin* office. Coming towards me I happened to notice a couple of Sœurs de Charité, conspicuously incongruous in the crowd with their white, flapping coifs and voluminous dark robes right down to their clumsy shoes. They were, as usual, an old one and a young one, their heads bent as though in blinkers to the mundane wickedness of the boulevard. There was something vaguely familiar in the gait of the younger one, muffled up in clothes though she was. She came close, her eyes downcast, her fingers on her rosary. It was Vera Mikhailovna. She did not even glance up at me. She passed along that boulevard where the painted women were beginning to appear, in a different world from theirs—or perhaps mine. I leave her to your clever theories."

He got up and walked out.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE

THE INFERNAL MACHINE

In that busy quarter-of-an-hour ere the great liner—steam strident from the exhaust-pipes high up against the vast funnels, donkey-engines running for a preliminary test as they took up the slack of the cables to the attendant tugs—cast off from the landing-stage, but few of the preoccupied passengers noticed the handcuffed man hurried by two detectives up the third-class gangway into the ship. Those that did shrank back uncomfortably. He stumbled up like a man on the way to execution, pale, haggard, withdrawn into himself, faculties numbed by the imminence of his fate. His eyes stared without seeing.

The two detectives hustled him below, into the depths of the ship, along electric-lit corridors where the light of day never came. A steward preceded them as guide, indicated at last a cabin on the lowest berth-deck. The door was opened and he was thrust into the tiny apartment, dimly lit by a port-hole close under the roof, the river-water lapping green along its glass. The prisoner stood stock-still where he was pushed, bereft apparently of voluntary motion with limbs that shook helplessly as in an ague. His mean little face was immobilised almost to imbecility. One of the detectives stood over him, looked into his vacant eyes.

"Now, no nonsense, Jake—or we'll have to keep you tied up all the way," he said impersonally. With that, he unlocked the handcuffs. The prisoner's arms, freed, fell limply pendant. The detective turned and went out of the cabin.

The prisoner watched his exit with lack-lustre eyes that stared in a vague and increasing horror as the sound of the

key turning in the lock penetrated slowly to his consciousness. Suddenly, as though full perception released a spring in him, he leaped at the door.

"Let me out! Let me out! Let me out, I say!" he screamed at the top of his voice, hammering violently at the door. "Police!—police!—police!—'Ere! 'Ere! *'Ere!*—Come back!—Come back!" His cry rang out on a piercing note of almost maniac terror, of extreme urgency of appeal. "I've got something to tell yer—I've got something to tell yer! . . . *Don't let 'er start!* Don't let 'er start! . . . Oh, Gawd, don't let 'er start! . . . 'Ere! . . . 'Ere! Come back! . . . Police! . . . Come back!" He exhausted himself with a whirlwind of blows, hands and feet battering upon the closed door, with a flood of agonised appeals mingled with blood-curdling curses that dropped suddenly to whimpering humility and broke out again in a renewed fury of vehemence.

None answered him. The door remained closed. As he recoiled from it, gasping in despair and terror, he heard the shriek of the liner's siren in its last warning, the clank and rumble of cables paid out, the first throb of her engines awaking to life. A swirl of water in motion darkened the glass disc of the port.

He sank down to a seat upon his bunk, breathing heavily as from weak and overstrained lungs, his pinched face a ghastly grey. His eyes fixed themselves, fascinated, upon that porthole which the disturbed water obscured from instant to instant. They had cast off, were moving out upon their voyage across the ocean.

The reaction from his intense effort left him gripped in the paralysing certitude of isolation, of abandonment, of utter impotence. Penned here in this narrow steel cell, far below decks, like a prisoner in an *oubliette* to be forgotten, cries and noise were alike useless, if heard were only to be contemptuously ignored. Numbed to the core of him, he ceased to make a sound, sat vaguely staring before him into flitting mental pictures where his conscious intelligence intervened only by fits and starts.

He saw himself in the dilapidated parlour behind the boarded-up saloon in the squalid street beyond the

dock-gates, saw once more the white, pinched face of the deformed little German-Jew chemist light up with evil triumph as he hoisted the heavy suit-case on to the table around which the "comrades" craned forward with eager interest. He saw him open it and, in a breathless silence, draw forth—a chunk of coal! The little Jew held it up for the appreciation of his companions.

"Dere you are, comrades!" He heard again the throaty, malicious chuckle of the inventor's voice. "Cast in steel—I enamelled it mineself—and you can do vat you like vid it." He giggled like one diabolically insane. "You can drop it—you can hit it—you can do anyding you like vid it—*except burn it!*"

O'Donnell, the big Irishman, had taken it from him like a loving-cup and had gazed down upon it with almost affectionate admiration.

"And if it should by accident be shovelled into a liner's furnaces, comrade?" he had asked, grimly facetious, in his pleasant Irish tones, his phraseology emphasising, as was his wont, the fact that he was a man of education.

"It vill blow de belly out of her!" the little chemist had answered with a sudden violent ferocity. "Dose explosives—dey vill blow de belly out of de biggest ship dat efer sailed!"

O'Donnell had smiled amiably and, still holding aloft the chunk of pseudo-coal like a loving-cup, had looked around upon the clustered, gaunt faces of the "comrades" as though in selection of one to whom to give it.

"Comrades!" he had exclaimed, his soft voice never more mellifluous, "we are going to strike a real blow this time—one the bloodsuckers will feel and remember! They shall know that the solidarity of labour is no vain boast!"

Neither in Jake Bravinsky's reverie of reminiscence, nor at the moment upon those eager faces craned towards the thing the big Irishman held, was there any perception of unintended irony. A longshoreman's strike was in progress, and the white-collared brigade recruited from the desks of the shipping company's skyscraper had sworn to turn the *Gargantuan* round and get her to sea again, with mails, passengers, bunker-coal and some at least of her

cargo. They were going to make good, it seemed, thanks not a little to the strong force of police who protected them from the none too benevolent solicitude of the awkwardly-idle workers who massed sullenly beyond the locked dock-gates. But not one of that grim little group in the dilapidated parlour was either a striker or a worker.

Neither Chlodzky, the Pole, Lipoff, the Russian, nor he, Jake Bravinsky, the weedy, degenerate product of two generations in East End London, had ever done a day's work in their lives except under the stern pressure of necessity or the law. He, Jake Bravinsky, urgently needing distance between him and the English police, had certainly assisted to fire the stoke-hold of a freighter all the way from Liverpool to New York—and when they arrived the chief engineer had met him half-way and fired him. That was his only recent occasion of labour, and none of the others could boast of activities less remote. Yet they were not conscious hypocrites, these men. Viewing themselves in the distorted mirrors of their souls, they were rather martyrs, they who preached, with fierce energies sustained on a meagre pittance from mysterious sources, the Cause, the Red Revolution that should, in theory at least, glut the poverty-stricken with the wealth of their oppressors.

Red Revolutionary also was Rosa Bauermann, the most fanatic, the least self-seeking of them all. He, Jake Bravinsky, could never look upon her without a little secret awe—and yet her ugly, great gash of a red mouth, her blazing dark eyes, her bobbed black hair, fascinated him, stirred him to the depths.

"Whose shall be the honour?" Comrade O'Donnell had pursued, looking round upon the group, his pleasant, well-bred voice in ironic incongruity with his more than shabby appearance and the terrible implication of his query. "What comrade's hand shall deal the blow?"

And Rosa Bauermann had turned her head towards him, Jake Bravinsky, had looked upon him—had looked right into him so that he shuddered—with those great dark eyes that flashed enigmas. And Jake Bravinsky's little human soul was suddenly molten as though with volcanic fires—he had caught his breath with the strangeness of it,

could not, for an agonised moment where Rosa Bauermann seemed like a brooding divinity that filled the room ready to bestow itself upon high daring, cry out his acceptance.

His own voice had sounded strange to him when he uttered it. " Give it 'ere, comrade ! . . . I'll do the job ! 'Aven't I done . . . ? " and he had boasted vaingloriously of fire-raising and sabotage. He ventured a glance towards Comrade Rosa, found her still smiling in fierce appreciation, and boasted again. And Comrade O'Donnell had handed him the lump of pseudo-coal. . . .

And then the next picture—the funnels and upper works of the *Gargantuan* lividly illumined in the glare of the purplish-white arc-lamps that painted her on the night as the volunteer gangs worked feverishly at her, shift relieving shift. The long line of warehouses in the deep contrasting shadow from that blaze blackened out the bottom of the picture—a blackness to which he crept and dodged, avoiding scrutiny, a heavy object close-hugged to his breast.

Then closer, viewed from a dark angle of the warehouse wall, he saw, in a proximity that dwarfed him, the towering sides of the great liner at the quayside, her gangways busy with hurrying, diminutive figures absorbed in purposeful activity. High up, silhouetted bars of black, rectangular tracery in the fierce illumination higher still, the transporters on a level with the bridge-deck above her cliff-like flanks rumbled outwards with their pendant, swinging burthens and lowered them with an endless outrun of tenuous wire-rope into the unseen depths of her holds.

Below, on the quayside criss-crossed by railroad tracks, locomotives puffed and shrieked as they butted their trains of clanking freight-cars, vehicle by vehicle, to the tips. Car after car, quoined on the platform of the cages, rose its twenty feet upon the elevator, heeled suddenly, and discharged its black contents with a clattering, clanging roar, down the iron shoot into the bunkers of the ship. Train beyond train, of coal and merchandise, stood ranged upon the sidings, awaiting its turn for sling or cataract.

Towards one of those trains, the nearest, he crept stealthily from shadow to shadow, weak-kneed fear and

diabolical malice at conflict within him. He cursed, automatically, under his breath, in an escape of nervous tension, as he approached it. It stood engineless, unguarded, but to his disgust not one car of it was in the shadow.

For a moment he had hesitated, his burden heavy in his arms, in a temptation of relinquishment. Then the image of Rosa Bauermann, her smile of enigma turning upon him, had come up before him—and the fierce little chemist's exultant phrase, " Blow de belly out of her ! " had echoed in strange depths of him, an invocation that called up a flood of his bitter primitive hatred for these phenomena of a civilisation from which he was excluded, and which he himself was impotent to create. The Sioux prowling around the stockade, the Barbarian bursting in upon the monuments of Ancient Rome, ground their teeth even as he, in just such a blind jealous rage of destruction.

During long minutes he had crouched in the shadow for his spring, awaiting opportunity. Then, in a temporary complete desertion of that stretch of quay, he leaped forward to the nearest truck, the last in the train.

In the full illumination, the white car-number, the black on white of the large label—' 34518 '—' Bunker-Coal—S.S. *Gargantuan* '—were vividly distinct before his vision, on a level with his eyes. He judged his distance, and hurled the thing he carried. The lump of pseudo-coal fell upon the heaped-up coal of the truck, indistinguishable from any other lump.

" Blow de belly out of her ! "—the fiercely vindictive phrase of the little German-Jew cripple had rung in his ears as he turned and fled into the night. . . .

Then the great moment of relief, when, a seemingly endless period of waiting in the shadows by the dock-gate suddenly terminated, he had mingled with the crowd of a shift coming off work and under the protection of a posse of policemen had passed into the street where the sullen crowd of strikers congregated. His job was done—even now perhaps that artfully dissimulated canister of steel was sliding into the depths of the great liner like a germ of death unperceived but inevitable. Now to announce it to the comrades !

The picture of Rosa Bauermann, with her shock of black hair over her disturbing eyes, her great red gash of a mouth parted in a smile that was no longer enigmatic, haunted him as he dodged out of the crowd of 'scabs' and sped, at a run, down the squalid streets to that little boarded-up saloon. His heart thumped heavily and unsteadily in his breast as he gave the arranged sequence of knocks upon its muddied door. He waited. It opened not. He knocked again and again waited. Still it remained shut, no sound or hint of life behind it. A quavering anxiety came up in him—surely they would have waited for his return?—Rosa, at least? What had happened? He knocked, more loudly, yet now sure in advance that there would be no response. The house echoed under his knock like a place deserted.

Then a policeman came round the corner, approached him with the measured, unhurried step of a patrol upon his normal beat. Jake waited not for that scrutiny he never dared confront. Whelmed in a disappointment that chilled his body, he had slunk away, a bitter curse upon his lips.

He was filled with a sombre anger against his confederates as he shuffled off to the miserable garret which was his home. They had better not play any tricks on him—or, sure as hell, he'd peach! He'd show 'em whether he, Jake Bravinsky, was a man to be trifled with! He had a little vision of the group of them, Rosa included, standing in the dock, himself as State's Evidence scorning their impotent rage. A variant of this picture was the last clear thought in his mind as he drew his ragged, dirty blanket over him and sank into a sleep that was the profound reaction after the strains of the day. . . .

He had awakened with the touch of a hand upon his shoulder. His blind start from the bed was the instinctive movement of an animal habitually under menace and now trapped. He looked up, in a pang of terror, into the face bent over him, the heavy, impassive countenance of a policeman. As he glanced around him, in the chill grey light of early morning, he saw that his garret was abnormally peopled—another policeman behind the one

who had awakened him, and, near the door, two men in plain clothes whom he instinctively recognised as from Scotland Yard.

"Come quietly, Jake," had said the voice from that moustachioed face up to which he stared. "We've got you."

The tightening of the grip upon his shoulder bore in upon him the hopelessness of escape. He let himself relax, resigned himself.

"What's it for?" he had asked sullenly. He remembered now, vividly, the sudden panic fear he had all but betrayed. Was it for his last night's job? The thought drove the blood from his heart—a life-sentence loomed startlingly inevitable, life or little less. He had not dared to raise his eyes.

It was one of the plain-clothes men who had answered.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Jake Bravinsky, on a charge of arson in Glasgow last May. I give you the usual warning."

Glasgow last May! He had almost shrieked mocking laughter in the revulsion of his relief.

A few hours later, shrunken between the two large policemen, he had shuffled into the dock of a District Police Court just commencing its business of the morning. The magistrate had glanced up at him with contemptuous indifference, registering him evidently as merely yet another of the miserable dead-beats presented to him by organised society for temporary elimination.

The magistrate could not suspect the exultant, savage triumph which filled that distorted little soul behind the pinched and pallid face. *He had done 'em!* They hadn't found out! No matter what they did to him, he had got his revenge! He'd show 'em! He gloated over the thought of that car-load of bunker-coal pouring into the bowels of the *Gargantuan*, visualised, with an unholy glee, the more satisfying in that it was perforce secret, the great liner throbbing on her course, her thousands of unconscious passengers at ease on her multitudinous decks, serenely superior to the ordinary perils of the sea, until that inevitable moment when an unsuspecting stoker—he loathed

stokers and stokeholds with a fierce and personal hatred—hurled *the* shovelful of coal on to her furnace fires.

Absorbed in this vision, he had scarcely heard the charge as it was read over to him. It concerned something very remote from him—he had almost forgotten that warehouse in Glasgow—the real, vital thing for which he was responsible was hidden from these blind fools. He exulted childishly. And *they'd never know!*—for once he was certain of immunity in his war against an unsympathetic world, for once he'd done 'em! He felt savagely contemptuous of the stolid policeman who gave evidence of arrest.

Then one of the plain-clothes men stood up in the court, addressed himself to the magistrate. What was he saying?

". . . We should be obliged if you would make an order without adjournment of this case. We hold a warrant for the extradition of the accused." He passed it up to the magistrate. "His presence in England is urgently required for trial with his confederates already arrested. We have retained a passage for him on the *Gargantuan*, which sails to-morrow morning."

The *Gargantuan!* The name, a cymbal-clash of significance, awoke him with a shock at the heart to full realisation of the detective's matter-of-fact request. The *Gargantuan!* Upon the moment he stood paralysed in an awful terror, sweat pearling upon him, his tongue dry in his mouth, yet impelled, almost beyond restraint, to shriek a protest. No! No!—not the *Gargantuan!* He jerked a wild, eye-dilated glance around him, as though in a dread of visible appearance of the supernatural. The irony which condemned him to his own destruction was nothing less than this to his primitive mind. He gasped for his only sound.

Sitting alone down there in that bare cabin in the depths of the ship his hands worked convulsively in repetition of his tense clutch upon the balustrade of the dock as he lived through the scene again . . . saw once more the magistrate nod his calm acquiescence.

Shriek out a warning? . . . Would they believe him?

He knew only too well that they would not. He had no proof—only his word, the word of a man obviously eager to postpone the processes of the law. Would the shipping company hold up the great liner, throw perhaps a hundred thousand dollars' worth of coal into the sea in despair of identifying the fatal lump, upon his mere assertion? He knew that they would not. The most they would do would be sceptically to warn the firemen of the ship to keep a sharp look-out for any suspicious block of coal—and he could well appraise, none better, the futility of such casual inspection.

And even if they listened—even if, improbably, he dodged the voyage of the *Gargantuan*, he would be assuredly shot or stabbed later on for his betrayal. He knew the 'comrades.' Either way he was in a trap. And, had he decided to shriek out the truth, he could not physically have done so. His tongue swelled in a dry mouth incapable of articulation as he watched the magistrate's pen sign the order. He had felt himself turn sick. . . .

And now here he was—he came back to himself after this half-dreaming recapitulation of the episodes leading up to his present situation—shut up in the depths of the great liner throbbing her way, with a powerful, steady whirring of her turbine engines, into the immensity of the ocean. Yes, she was well upon her course now—he was experienced enough to diagnose the full-powered evenness of the revolutions which set every plate and girder and fitting of her in subdued vibration. Down below—in those hellish stokeholds—the half-naked firemen were shovelling the coal into the white-hot glare of her furnaces, shovelling and again shovelling, until at last one lump that left their shovels for its fiery bed . . . he jumped to his feet again in a shriek of terror, banged against the door with frenzied fists.

He went mad, felt himself going more and more mad, flung himself at that locked door in a whirlwind of blind, wild energies that swept through him as from a source beyond him. Voice, feet and fists clamoured for release from this trap as, like a caged wild animal overmastered by its instincts, he hurled himself again and again against

that door which would not open. For all response, he might have been alone in a world destitute of man. His blows ceased suddenly, with that brusque reaction of the physically-unstable, as though in an exhaustion of the reservoir of force which had poured so tumultuously through the open sluice-gates of his being. Physical weakling as he also was, he sank down, his brain drugged in the stupefaction of an immense fatigue.

He slept, while that gloomy little cell about him, deep down in the mighty organism, quivered with the rush of the great liner as she hurried out to sea.

How long Jake Bravinsky lay in blessed unconsciousness at the foot of that door he did not know. He was awakened by its opening, by a sudden glare as the electric light was switched on. One of the detectives stood over him, accompanying a steward who brought food.

With dulled faculties that fumbled for definition of the vague terror he knew to be somewhere in the back of his mind—what was it?—he rose stiffly to his feet, tottered to his bunk. Then, seated, he looked up at the detective and remembered. His teeth chattered in the shiver which came over him. His lips parted as if for sudden utterance, but he could only stare dumbly. What use was it?—his brain began to work again—even if they turned round now the very next shovelful of coal might . . . He baulked at exact imagination of the cataclysm.

His deep-lying, bitter hatred of the law and its representatives surged up in him suddenly, presented to him doubtless by his subconscious self for solace, blotting out all else. Anyway, they were all in the same boat! They'd all go up, all drown, together—no warning, no chance to summon help by wireless! He almost chuckled as he thought of that stolidly superior detective dead—dead and unsuspecting until the moment. They'd all go like that, the——! He grouped them, all of them, everybody that was not himself, in an ugly word for justification of his enmity.

After a glance around the cabin, a test of the screwed-tight porthole, the detective motioned out the steward.

"Not so much of that noise, now!" he said, standing

over his prisoner. "Or we'll tie you up and gag you for the rest of the trip—you understand?" There was genuine menace in his tone. The weedy little wretch shrank back from him instinctively, the blood of two generations of gutter-thieves asserting itself in this close proximity to law personified. His bloodless lips quivered, but he made no sound.

After one last nod of significance, the detective left him to his food, turned the key once more upon him.

The first mouthful nearly choked him but then, hunger awaking at the taste, he ate ravenously, was still unsatisfied when all was finished.

The dishes he put down jarred and rattled with the pulsation of those mighty engines, far-away and hidden, indefatigable, so sure and steady in their unvarying whirr and yet to him so full of menace. He sat crouched upon the edge of his bunk, staring vacantly at the door, his mind fixed upon the continuance of that faintly heard humming of the turbines, of that quivering vibration which pervaded the ship. At the back of his consciousness somewhere was a perception of the steady rise and fall of the floor beneath his feet, the slightly marked lateral cant, slowly righting itself, which spoke of the fact that they were already far out at sea. But he concerned himself not with their position. The whirr of that machinery which drove them unflaggingly onward, which might at any moment cease, held him fascinated.

At each moment he expected the all-shaking roar. Yet those whirring revolutions continued unmodified in their normality, continued until their vibrations seemed to enter into him, to set his head whirling dizzily in a spin that was coincident with their own, beyond his control. His brain worked feverishly, as with an independent will, placing before him again and again pictures that he could not banish—the uprush of a sheet of flame, the headlong plunge beneath waves dotted with human heads of the great liner, decks ripped open and funnels awry—himself in the cabin clinging to the bunk as she sank sickeningly in utter darkness.

Again and again these pictures came before him, in a

merciless repetition, curiously exterior to himself, as though he stared at a maddening reiteration of the self-same scenes upon the screen of a cinematograph—in his head the whirring, identical with the whirring of the turbines, of the machine that would not stop.

He flung himself down upon his bunk in an exasperated effort to escape this involuntary visualisation of the terror to come; to sleep if possible. But still the whirring in his head continued, beyond his inhibition, placing before him again and again those pictures of impending doom at which the sweat came clammy on his brow. Like a machine it was, he thought, half delirious under his obsession, an infernal cinema machine—yes, that was it—the fever mounted in him—in his head was a whirring cinema machine over which he had no control. He sank at last into an uneasy sleep, in a dream where that cinema machine in his head was geared somehow to the whirring turbines, was itself that infernal machine that should explode. . . .

He was awakened from a nightmare, where he was clutched by nameless things, by the two detectives standing over him.

"Time for exercise, Jake," said one of them, as the prisoner stared blankly into his face.

He roused himself stupidly, grasping only two outstanding facts. He was still alive. That infernal whirring in his head had stopped.

The three of them passed out of the cabin into the long corridor, tenanted only by cleaners and an occasional hurrying steward, climbed stairways, and again stairways, and finally emerged into the damp, early-morning chill of the open air. They passed aft to the steerage deck where a few sailors were busy with hose and swabs. No other passengers had yet made their appearance.

His terror woke alive again in the wretched prisoner as, between his captors, he walked up and down that deck at a pace which they dictated to him. In his sleep down below there, the menace to his existence, although ever at the back of his consciousness, had lost actuality—seemed unbelievable when he awoke. Up here, on the deck of the great ship whose white super-structure lifted and sank

against the greys of a stormy sky, her shrouds moaning in the cold wind which smote him like a douche, he was brought sharply back to contact with reality. It *was* real—terribly real—this ship solitary upon the vast ocean where great waves rolled with foaming whitenesses under the torn clouds of an incipient gale. Even her immensity dipped to their turbulence.

He glanced along to the rows of boats swinging high up above the terraced promenade decks, ready for the almost unthinkable catastrophe, glanced still higher to where the four enormous funnels poured out volumes of black smoke that mingled with the low clouds. They fascinated him, those funnels. He could scarcely turn his back upon them when the limit of the deck was reached and he faced aft once more.

He looked at them again with a strange relief when yet once again they turned. They were still vomiting their smoke, volume upon volume in endless succession of emergence, black smoke that was normal and still normal welling and still welling in an even laziness of black coils that rolled about the funnel-tops ere they were torn away by the wind. He agonised for the sudden upward burst of flame from one of them. . . .

The gale grew worse as the day wore on. Even Jake Bravinsky, immured in his steel cell far below decks, could tell that its violence increased from hour to hour. The loose fittings of the cabin jangled and rang in the staggering impact of the ship into the great waves which smote her at brief and almost regular intervals. The streaming glass disc of the port rose disturbingly towards a zenith which flooded the confined space with a cold grey light, and fell back again through a long arc to souse itself in green waters and a temporary gloom. Though he could see nothing, the panic-gripped wretch crouched upon his bunk could imagine the totality of the scene—the great liner wallowing in the enormous rollers which ran upon her in an endless succession of lifting, moving ridges diagonally to her bows, the beaten smoke—still in uninterrupted emergence from her funnels—mingling with the spume and spindrift flying over her upper works.

At every few moments a vicious intensification of the whirring vibration of her turbines was eloquent of propellors lifted clear of the seas and racing in furious and futile energy. Then, with a thudding crash, that shook every atom of her structure, her bows lifted again to yet another wave on which the propellers, once more immersed, drove her fiercely forward.

Hour after hour crept by in alternate illuminations and sousings of the porthole, in disconcertingly sudden drops that lifted the stomach in their apparent bottomlessness, in a never-ending succession of savage crashes and violent blows that checked for the instant the mighty momentum of that enormous mass of steel, driven onwards and yet onwards by its own unconquerable power. And still the whirring vibration of the machinery that was the heart of her continued, continued until once more it became the dominant perception of his overwrought brain, continued through minute after minute, hour after hour, where to him each instant menaced awful cessation.

Once more, to his horror, he found his brain identifying itself with those rapid revolutions. Once more the machine in his head began to whirr, beyond his control, presenting vividly to his mental vision those terrifying pictures of disaster—the upgush of flame, the eviscerated ship plunging into the depths. And now to these pictures was added another, suggested by his experience of the morning—the wind-torn seascape of white foam creaming upon the heads of an infinity of waves leaden-grey under a sullen sky. No boat could live, be launched even, in such a sea. He visualised, nevertheless, involuntarily, the ugly, panic-stricken rush for the davits—and then remembered, with a sickened shudder, that down here he was debarred even from participation in that hopeless fight for life, had not even that slender chance.

The pictures repeated themselves, over and over again, to the accompaniment of the whirring turbines. He felt himself going crazed, tortured into madness, under their diabolical insistence. If only he could shut them off, stop that infernal whirring cinema machine in his head!

Food came to him midway through that endless, timeless

day, was pushed into the cabin as to a kennelled dog by a callous steward who slammed the door upon him, and would not wait for the cry he was so long in bringing to utterance. He had had a vague idea of calling for a doctor—anything to stop this maddening visualisation of the impending terror, to stop that infernal machine whirring, whirring, whirring relentlessly in his tortured brain. He tried to eat for a distraction. Faint though he was, the food sickened him. He pushed it away untouched.

Night came. The port that lifted itself in its long, slow rise above the waves ceased to be a disc of light ; it rose and fell in an equal gloom, water leaking in through its brass circumference. The cabin was illumined only by a diffused radiance entering by the narrow slit above the door from a source somewhere along the corridor.

Still his brain remained terror-riveted upon the one theme, a furiously-whirring machine out of control—he found himself still staring, against his will, at a funnel whose rolling, heavy smoke suddenly shot upwards upon a sheet of red flame, a geyser of flying cinders. . . .

The hours passed in the half-light of his steel cell, far down in the depths of the great ship that crashed and thudded tirelessly into the buffeting seas. The dishes slid, overturned, upon the floor as she pitched and wallowed and shivered in the ever-renewed collision of blindly meeting forces. Still the feverish whirring vibration of the turbines continued undiminished, permeating every atom of her structure as it did every fibre of his body, blurred ever and anon by the heavier vibration of propellers racing free in the instant or two before their automatic check came into play, stunned into abeyance every minute or so by the smashing impact of yet another great wave that swept down her length in a swish and scatter of flying water.

Up above there—the scene came vividly to him—behind the oilskinned watch upon her bridge, the great funnels were still belching black smoke into the blackness of the night. Under them—he thrilled with fanatic hatred—damnably-confident passengers in their evening finery were seated at flower-decked tables in gilded saloons. Under them again, far, far below, the firemen were shovelling,

shovelling, naked to the waists in the eye-scorching hell of the open furnace doors. From the bunkers the coal was tumbling down to them in an avalanche of black chunks, all indistinguishably like each other.

His hyper-excited mental activity began to find new channels for itself. He found himself speculating—unable to stop speculating, a new form of torment reeled out by that ceaselessly whirring machine in his head—on the nature of the explosion when it should occur. Would he hear it in this part of the ship? He remembered, in newspaper accounts of torpedoings during the war, the statements of passengers in big liners who had heard nothing, felt only a slight shock, when the ship's side was blown in. That diabolical little German-Jew's infernal machine would explode deep down in the very centre of the vessel—" blow de belly out of her " ; the forecast rang in his ears. What sound would come to him here? A mighty roar, rending her vitals, flinging everyone prostrate, or . . . ?

What was that? His heart stopped in recognition of a far-away, muffled shock. He listened, his senses strained to an intense acuteness. What was that faint shock, deep down in the ship? His scream rang, strange and terrifying, in his ears, unconscious as he was that he had uttered it. He started from his bunk, clutched at the edge of it with claw-like, rigid fingers, sweat pearling upon his forehead, as he steadied himself upon the sloping floor that listed away under him and came not back. He listened, ears at strain for the slightest sound. There was a strange hush, an utter absence of the vibration so long continued. *The engines had stopped!*

At last! It was the explosion. He had no doubt of it. A breathless terror swept over him, denying utterance to the flood of wild blasphemy which rose in him like an inversion of agonised prayer. Mingled with it was a great relief. The whirring of that infernal machine in his head had stopped. He could think now, think with a rapid lucidity that amazed him. His mind, miraculously alert, took in all the implications of his position, while yet he clung to the bunk, speechless and incapable of movement.

Would anyone come to let him out? There was a rapid scurry of feet along the corridor. It passed, ceased definitely. Then, in heart-stopping confirmation of his fear, the light in the corridor went out suddenly. He stood clutching at his bunk, in an absolute darkness that enveloped him almost tangibly. He let go of the bunk in a dash for where he knew the door to be, slipped, with a sharp stab of accentuated terror, upon a wet floor sloping permanently at an acute angle, despite its slow rise and its seemingly endless subsequent subsidence. He crawled upwards on it, knocked his head against the door, pulled himself upright with a grasp upon its handle. Then, in a sudden access, he found his voice. He shrieked—piercingly, shriek upon shriek that rang through an appalling silence —shrieked like a maniac forgotten in his cell.

None came to answer him. There was no sound in the corridor outside. What was happening in that deathly silence which pervaded the great ship? He failed to bring himself to exact imagination. She still rose, still subsided, heavily, lazily. But the list which sloped the floor slippery under his feet remained uncorrected. Was she still afloat —settling, slowly but surely? He ceased his maniac shrieks to listen. There was no sound. This far-down corridor, remote from the general life of the ship, tenanted only by emigrants on the westward voyage, was deserted. He shook furiously at the implacably-locked door, crashed his fists against its panels in frenzied blows that had no result but the flaying of his knuckles. He flung himself against it like a wild thing in a cage. The door remained immovable.

He stopped again, listened—listened for the rushing cataract of water he knew must be pouring into the ship, down her companionways, along her corridors. He heard nothing. There was no sound perceptible in that rayless blackness which pressed upon him, save a sough and swish of water exterior to the ship. Then he understood. Of course, they would have closed down the water-tight doors! He shrieked a curse at that unknown officer on the bridge for performing his obvious duty, in a vivid imagination of the great steel doors sliding down into their immovable

positions, shutting off the water indeed from this compartment, shutting him off inexorably from escape even could he break out into the corridor.

In the horror of this realisation he relaxed his hold upon the door tilted forward against him, slipped and slid, in that utter blackness, down the sloping floor to the wall of the ship. He felt over it with trembling eager hands, felt for the heavy brass fastening of the porthole. It was still firm, though his hands were wetted in the water which welled up gently around its rim.

Despite the complete cessation of the crashing impacts with which the ship had so long smashed into the heavy waves, her equilibrium was by no means stable. She still rose, though heavily and draggingly ; still sank, ever more and more deeply it seemed, in a sluggish roll which emphasised in its swing-back the ugly list that the lift had failed to correct. In that engulfing blackness she seemed to subside ever lower and lower, inert, incapable of righting herself, cradled still by a motion of the waters that swished and washed against her flanks, sinking with every lurch into rayless, unimaginable depths.

The frenzied man huddled there in the darkness against the wall wet with water from the leaking port had no doubt of it. *He knew.* That infernal chunk of coal had done its work only too well. Paralysed for any movement, his imagination worked feverishly and yet, in that complete dark, could form no definite mental images. To his horror, that terrifying machine in his head had started again—beyond his control. It was like being in a darkened movie-hall, where the still whirring machine could only project flitting and fragmentary pictures from a torn film in the intervals of frequent ' black-outs ' upon the screen. But still the machine went on maddeningly—the more maddening because, somehow, the machine was part of himself. The mental photograph of a sinking derelict he had once seen recurred over and over again in that patchy sequence—the hulk sagging in the seas which lapped over her, higher and imperceptibly higher—the decks awash, waves licking the canvas of her bridge—and then the silent, sudden engulfment, disappearance.

Were *they* still afloat, upon the surface ? He dared not give himself the answer. Even though they had sunk beneath the wave-tops, he remembered—all scraps of apposite knowledge that he had ever picked up coming to him with a memory preternaturally acute—that great ships like the *Gargantuan*, if their bulk-heads were closed, did not drop like a stone to the bottom of the sea, but remained, swung as it were at an intermediate depth, in a slow and gradual subsidence as one compartment after another was burst into by the pressure of the water.

Such—he knew it—was their position now, rolling sluggishly fathoms down—how many, he wondered ?—below the surface of the sea, sinking gently, ever sinking, down, down, down in the darkness towards the bottom. *That darkness !* The awfulness of it came upon him suddenly in a renewed access of horror. He put his hand out in it, invisibly. That darkness, utterly black, blacker than the blackest night, which enveloped him and seemed to choke him as he gasped in his terror—*that darkness would never be lifted again !* It was black, stifling darkness for him, for all that was left of his life—darkness, complete, unbreakable, inexorable, until—until—*death*—death in that blackness ! He shrieked again and again, purposelessly, for he knew there was no hope of rescue, shrieked stridently in a mere blind escape of energy from overcharged nerves.

For an indefinite period of time, hideously prolonged, he sat huddled and gasping, crouching against that wet wall of his lightless cell. How long was it since *it* had happened, since the engines had fallen silent, since their relapse into darkness ? It seemed an eternity, was certainly many, many hours. Long, long ago they must have disappeared below the surface of the sea. He imagined bulkhead after bulkhead bursting under a torrent of unillumined water as they sank deeper and yet deeper, narrowing and ever narrowing the margin of his life. Presently the last bulkhead would burst, and then. . . . Or perhaps it would not burst. Perhaps it would hold and then, in a few days, as he used up the limited supply of air, he would suffocate. In a few days ! He had been here, in this darkness, days already—days and days !

Yes, days and days he had been here and he was suffocating—he was suffocating now! He felt his heart, big and thumping heavily, in his breast, swelling as though it would choke him. He tried to rise to his feet upon that unstable, sloping floor, reached for an unfound support in the blackness, and sank down again, gasping.

Then, in that pitch blackness, the ship gave a heavy lurch, lifted once more as with difficulty, subsided in a long roll that threw him against the wall. The floor seemed to sink endlessly beneath him. He clawed himself partially upright and shrieked, with his last breath, curses—curses—curses upon Rosa Bauermann, upon the 'comrades,' upon that diabolical little German-Jew. Yes, she was going now—going finally. He shrieked once more in that awful, oppressive blackness, shrieked, his ears singing, that infernal machine in his head—behind the eyes that could not see—whirring madly to a climax, shrieked with his heart seeming to burst his breast, shrieked—there was a mighty crash somewhere. The last bulkhead! He essayed one more shriek that was soundless, would not come beyond a gurgle, put his hands blindly to his face, felt them, with a feeble wonderment, wet with a warm fluid from his mouth, reeled dizzily upon that sloping floor. Ah! at last, thank Gawd! thank Gawd!—there were lights, lights!—flashes and stars of dancing light! He pitched, head-foremost, into a gulf of blackness.

. . . . . .

As dawn broke, the S.S. *Gargantuan*, crippled by a couple of smashed propeller-shafts, and afflicted with a heavy list to port that caused her captain to analyse expletively the ineptitude of an amateur stevedore gang at stowing cargo, was picked up by a large freighter with a nose for salvage. Her passengers, who had whiled away the anxious hours by singing hymns or playing poker, according to their various tastes, had all of them long ago forgotten the temporary inconvenience caused them by a ten-minutes break-down of the electric-lighting dynamos at the critical moment.

A few hours later, the ship's doctor wrote out, for the behoof of two exasperated detectives, a technically exact

certificate of the death of Jake Bravinsky from natural causes. "Burst blood-vessel," he interpreted laconically, as they scratched their heads over his text-book diagnosis.

. . . . . .

About the same time, the American manager of the shipping company was dictating a letter to the harbour-authorities wherein he expressed himself as highly dissatisfied with their attitude in regard to freight-car No. 34518, laden with bunker-coal for the S.S. *Gargantuan*, and hurled into the dock by a mob of infuriated strikers the night before the ship sailed.

If the spirits of the departed can re-visit this earthly sphere, it is pleasant to think that possibly around that irate manager hovered the equally irate but impotent shade of Jake Bravinsky frightened out of existence under false pretences.

OUT OF THE NIGHT

OUT OF THE NIGHT

GEORGE FLEMING was waiting for me on the platform as the train ran into Falmouth station—six feet of honest simplicity attired in a dirty sweater, a pair of disgraceful trousers, unevenly turned-up, and a battered pair of black shoes irregularly whitened with the incrustations of salt water. His weather-tanned and freckle-yellowed face lit up with a diffident grin as he saw me descend from my compartment.

"Jolly good of you to come, Dickie," he said, making me wince with his hand-grip. "I hope you won't be bored to death."

"Not a bit of it," I answered cheerily. I don't pretend to be much of a yachtsman—though I may say I looked the part far more than George—but I had jumped at his invitation to a couple of weeks 'knocking about' in Cornish waters. There is nothing better for city-jaded nerves than a rest-cure on a smart little yacht with a couple of hands or so to do all the rough work. "I've been looking forward to it."

Handing over my suitcase to a zealous small boy, my friend and I set out for the waterside. As we walked, I took stock of him. I had not seen him since last winter. My sister had got hold of him then, and, privately announcing her determination to civilise him, had lured him to several dances where he had presented a figure of pitiably uncouth and tongue-tied misery. I remembered that she had startled us to ribald laughter by an alleged discovery that he was 'head over heels' in love with some friend of hers—what was her name?—some Irish girl. It was absurd, of course; George was the sort of fellow that

can't look at a woman without getting red in the face. My reading of it was right. There had been nothing in it. The girl had gone back to Ireland, and George—we had rather lost sight of George. He was evasively reticent when I asked him what he had been doing with himself all the year. He had been 'just pottering about' up and down the coast. We arrived at the quay.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, pointing to a small, dingy-sided craft, with what appeared to be a wireless aerial mounted on stick-like extensions of her two masts. She was moored to a buoy out among a flotilla of dainty yachts. "There's the *Eileen*—the one painted black." Had she been an America Cup challenger there could not have been more of affectionate pride in his tone. My heart went down with a bump.

"Why," I said with a ghastly attempt at jollity, "she's a regular liner—wireless and all! That's wireless, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered. "One of my hobbies, you know. I meant to have taken it down but I had to be ashore pretty sharp this morning to get the stores in. Can't sail with the thing up, you know—gets horribly in the way."

"Oh," I remarked, (we were now walking along the quay to where a small boy in a dingy was waving to us), "you don't use it at sea, then?"

"Good Lord, no! I only rig it up when we're all snugged down." (George's speech was apt to lapse into horribly clumsy antitheses, typical of him, somehow.) "I like to listen-in at night, you know, and hear all that's going on—broadcasted concerts and all sorts of things. Makes life heaps more cheery. It gets a bit dull sometimes all by one's self."

I stopped him on that quayside.

"George," I said, in alarm, "you don't mean to say you sail that yacht *alone?*"

He laughed. "Of course I do!" he replied. "You didn't expect a skipper and a crew, did you? It's doing things by yourself that makes the fun of it. You'll soon see."

My conception of fun differed. But there was no help

for it now and I refrained from comment. A few minutes later, I had lowered myself gingerly into the dinghy where a small boy had sat sentry over an immense assortment of parcels, and George was sculling me out into the harbour.

"Here we are! Catch hold!" I grabbed at a rope hanging over the yacht's side. "Up you go!" By an incredible feat of gymnastics, I scrambled on board. "Stand by for the parcels!" He handed them up to me, followed himself. "Now then, we'll just stow all this gear and then"—he burst into cacophonous song, "A life on the ocean wave—a life on the ocean wave!" His high spirits were a hideous mockery of my own.

"You never could sing, George," I remarked, by way of giving myself some sort of revenge.

He did not hear me. He had dived down the small companion into the cabin. "Sling 'em all down to me, my lad!" he shouted out. "That's the idea!" He encouraged me boisterously as I passed down the stores. For a minute or two, he rummaged about below, and then he called to me. "Come and have a look round, Dickie." I squirmed down half-a-dozen steps and hit my head on the hatch. "Pretty snug, isn't it?"

The man who invented the word 'snug' had a genius for tact. It is a charming way of saying that one is confoundedly cramped. There was a screwed-down table in the centre of the cabin, allowing one just space enough to slither round to an upholstered seat on each side. "Good head-room, isn't there?—when the hatch is up," he said cheerily. I thought there might be. "It's up now, of course," he explained, and that illusion was dispelled.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to what looked like a closed desk against the forward bulkhead.

"Oh, that's my wireless set—built it myself," he said. "Show it you to-night. Haven't got time now. All hands on deck!—and let's get clear of this confounded harbour!"

For the next few minutes I felt horribly in the way as George busied himself with the tangle of ropes on deck. In an amazingly short time, the wireless was stowed, the jib and mizzen set, and then, almost before I had realised

what was happening,we had cast off our mooring and George shouted to me to go to the tiller while he hauled up the mainsail. We began to move through the water.

"Topping breeze, isn't it?" said George, as he came aft and took the tiller from me. "I hate creeping out in a dead calm. It's a paraffin motor and stinks infernally."

"You've got an auxiliary engine, then?"

"Yes. Jolly useful, you know, sometimes. It's under there," he said, indicating with his foot a closed hatch just in front of the tiller. "Look out for the boom! I'm going to tack."

I dodged to avoid the boom of the mainsail as the *Eileen* came up to the wind and heeled smartly to her new course. She curtseyed prettily to the sparkling waves.

"Yes, as I was saying, the auxiliary is jolly useful sometimes. No joke to get becalmed in a fog out in the Channel. Brutes think nothing of running you down."

He prattled on, thoroughly happy, while I sat on the deck, accommodating myself as best I could to its slope first to one side and then the other, and lit my pipe with more bravado than enjoyment. But enjoyment came to me as we sped over that ruffled sea, just foam-flecked under the cloudless blue sky, with a kissing splash at our bows and a gurgle under our counter as the yacht lifted and dropped to the swell rolling in from the outer waters. The magnificent Cornish scenery slid away behind us, was soon but a background painted on the lower edge of the blue sky, as beautiful and unreal as a panorama by an artist with an eye for atmospheric effects in the September sunshine.

This is not a panegyric of the delights of yachting, but the story of an adventure. George, looking over my shoulder, wants me to put in all sorts of technical details about the course we took, wind and tide, and all the rest of it. I should only make a mess of them. Suffice it that to me the day was delightful, and that dusk saw us creeping towards a little cove at the other side of the Lizard where George said we should be snug against anything short of a westerly gale. The wind had gone down with the sun, and we had to use the motor to arrive at our anchorage.

The steak and onions over which, a little later, we sat in

the little cabin were the perfect end of a perfect day. When the last morsel had vanished, George pulled out his pipe, filled and lit it.

"Wash up first," he ordained, "and then we'll hear what the great world has to say to us."

The great world seemed immensely remote, unreal, in this secluded cove, where the only sound was the faint *plash-plash* of water against the *Eileen's* hull as she rocked almost imperceptibly on the incoming tide. Emerging on deck from the lamp-light of the cabin, we seemed uncannily suspended in the blue night, far from the familiar earth, the brighter of the myriad stars above reflecting themselves in the glassy calm as though they shone from below us, in an illusion of encompassing cosmic space heightened by the hushed silence. Only at a second glance could the outline of the embracing cliffs be deduced rather than discerned from their dark occultation of blue infinity. As I slung over the washing-up bucket it splashed into ghostly phosphorescent fire.

George's cheery jocularities, making light of the task of washing-up, seemed incongruously out of place in that great silence. The eerieness of it was still upon me as we returned to the cabin.

He went briskly to what had looked like a desk against the forward bulwark of the cabin, lifted off the cover, revealed a complicated array of electrical apparatus, coils and knobs and switches, which utterly transcended my understanding. My ignorance of these matters, familiar enough to nearly every schoolboy nowadays, is singularly complete. The only objects I recognised, or thought I recognised, among those mysterious instruments, were three ordinary electric-light bulbs fitted upright in a row on a little black board. And when I looked more closely, I saw that even those were different from any I had seen. A little metal cylinder, open at the ends, fitted over the filament of each.

"Pretty good set, that, eh?" remarked George with a fictitious nonchalance that failed to disguise the pride in his voice. "Made it myself—every bit of it."

"Wonderful!" I said, with genuine respect. "And

can you pick up wireless telephony as well as ordinary signals with it ? " I expect it was an absurd question—I have a knack of being inane before these technical mysteries—but George only smiled tolerantly.

" Pick up anything that's going," he said. " You'll hear presently." He busied himself with fitting coils of wire into sockets and other little adjustments of the apparatus that were meaningless to me.

" Can you send messages as well as receive them ? "

" I *can*," he answered, frowning abstractedly at some little gadget that was obstinate under his fingers, " it means starting up the motor and connecting it with the dynamo. Still, there's not much point in it. I don't want to talk to anybody. I only want to hear. But I have found it useful sometimes—got my position more than once when I was in a fog. The shore station will give it you. Cross-bearings, you know."

This meant nothing to me, but I refrained from further questioning. George had evidently completed his preparations. He gave me a telephone headpiece, with receivers fitting over both ears, and put on a similar one himself.

" Now listen ! " he said. He switched on the three lamps, twisted a knob or two, manipulated a little lever with thumb and forefinger.

I heard a low, confused murmuring that rose and fell as he played with that tiny lever, and then suddenly the faint sound of a human voice, out of pitch like a gramophone that is running down. He shifted the lever a fraction further round the arc it traced—and a man's voice, startlingly loud and distinct, spoke into my ears.

" *2 L O closing down for three minutes !* " it said, with carefully deliberate enunciation. It made me jump, so unexpected was it.

" We've just missed a turn," said George. " That's London Broadcasting Station. Concert from eight to nine. Not bad for three hundred miles off, eh ? "

" Marvellous ! " I exclaimed. To me, that voice coming out of the void was positively uncanny.

" We'll see what else is going on while we're waiting," he said. " Would you like to hear the ships talking ? They

work on a 600 wave-length. 2 L.O. works on 360." He shifted the little lever a fraction and I heard a multiplication of little, low-toned raucously-metallic buzzings, irregularly and rapidly reiterated. "That's Morse, of course," explained George. "There's half-a-dozen ships talking at once. Can you hear that louder one?—that must be quite close—ten miles off. And now the shore station's talking. Do you catch the different note?"

It was weird to sit there in that little cabin of the anchored yacht and listen to those ships conversing with each other, unintelligible to me though were their messages, hundreds of miles away across the ocean some of them. George glanced at his watch and switched the lever back to its former position.

The buzzings of the ships ceased instantly. Instead, came that clearly distinct man's voice, louder than George's close beside me.

"*2 L O speaking. The next item will be a violin solo by Miss Sylvia Smith—Rubenstein's Melody in F. But before she begins I must warn listeners-in that we have again received serious complaints of oscillating valves. Will all listeners-in kindly see that their valves do not oscillate?*" The human touch in that reproof coming out of the night was to me singularly impressive.

A moment later, the violin solo began, as full and rich and sweet, the piano accompaniment as ripplingly clear, as if the performers were in that cabin with us. And they were three hundred miles away, with no tangible connection to that little yacht hid in a cove of the Cornish coast! And thousands of people in a vast radius from that distant city were listening to that music vibrating noiselessly through the night till it impinged upon a particular juxtaposition of wires connected to a telephone receiver, while all the time, uninterfered-with, unperceived, the ships of all nations were talking together. To my mind, naïvely unsophisticated when it comes to the exact sciences, the whole thing was like magic.

I said as much to George when the violin finished and 2 L O once more shut down for three minutes.

He smiled. "You've only heard the fringe of it," he

said. "We've only been on the low waves. Let's see what's happening on the higher ones." He took the couple of coils from their sockets, fitted a pair of larger ones, fiddled again with knob and lever.

My ears were filled with a confused mingling of high, piping notes, like a lot of distant flutes trying to get themselves in tune.

"D'you hear the difference on the high waves?" he remarked. "Quite a different note." He adjusted his lever so that one series came clear, a rapid repetition of one squeaking sound. "That's one of the trans-Atlantic stations working. You can't pick it up—mechanically transmitted." He turned the lever again. "There's the Eiffel Tower—do you catch its call sign—F L—F L?" I took his word for it. "They work on 2,600. Now we'll see what Germany's doing. Listen!—That's Königswusterhausen, 2,800. They telephone only up to 5.30. They're Morsing now. Nobody but London is telephoning at this hour."

"Is that the highest wave-length—2,800?" I asked.

"Good Lord, no! Some stations work on a much higher wave than that. Bordeaux works on 23,450. Would you like to hear it?" He fitted a yet larger pair of coils. "There's no telephony on these high wave-lengths. They're mostly used for trans-Atlantic telegraph work." He manipulated his lever. "Do you hear it? That's Bordeaux." I listened to the irregularly repeated fluting note that had no translatable significance for me.

"And is that the highest your instrument will register?" I queried.

"No. I could catch anything up to 35,000. But there's no point in listening-in on those high waves. There's no one using them. Bordeaux is about the limit. But still we'll have a try, if you like. Might hear a message from Mars!" he said, jokingly. "It was listening-in on these unused series that Signor Marconi got his mysterious sounds." He made further adjustments of his apparatus.

There was dead silence. Concert, ships' messages, Königswusterhausen, Bordeaux, all alike were blotted from audition. I wondered whether anything had gone wrong

with the instrument, so complete was that cessation of the ether-borne murmurs and pipings to which I had been listening.

"Nothing, you see," said George. "That was 25,000. We'll try a little higher." Again he altered the adjustment. "28,000—nothing." Dead silence—save for the just-heard *plash-plash* of the waves against our craft. He moved the lever further. "30,000—Hallo!—what's that? He glanced at me in sharp surprise. "Listen!"

"*Hallo, hallo,* Adler! *R.H.Q. speaking. Q Branch wants your report.*" The voice was loud and clear.

"What's R.H.Q.?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know?" replied George. "Listen!"

Another voice answered in what seemed to be guttural German. We couldn't catch a word of it.

The first voice spoke again.

"*Hallo,* Adler!—*Fetch Mr. Maguire,*" it said, on a note of irritation. "*Herr Maguire bringen!*" The amateurish German was peremptory in its utterance.

"*Ja, ja,*" answered the second voice. "*Warten Sie nur.*"

There was a moment or two of silence.

"What have we got on to?" I asked.

"Can't imagine," said George. "It's a most unusual wave-length for telephony." He frowned at the instrument-board while we waited. Suddenly we both jumped at a new voice—a woman's voice on an accent of wild distress.

"*Help! Help!*" it cried. "*Help—oh!*" The voice broke off abruptly, as though the speaker had been snatched away from the instrument. A sharp exclamation from George sent my eyes to him. He was staring in front of him, his broad, honest face twisted in a curiously tense and startled expression. At the same time I thought I heard an indistinct noise of scuffling from the receivers tight against my ears. But it was George's strange look that held my attention for the moment.

"No, it couldn't be!" he muttered, frowning. There was an odd, puzzled alarm in his tone. Before I could ask him what 'couldn't be', a man's voice spoke, a different voice from those we had heard.

"*Hullo—R.H.Q?*" Then, as though he half-turned his head to someone behind him. "*Take her away! Tie her up somewhere! How did she get loose?*" The voice was again clear and full into the telephone. "*Hullo—R.H.Q.! Maguire speaking. Is that Cassidy?*"

"*Sure!*" came the first voice. "*What's the report?*"

"*All O.K. Five thousand rifles, fifty machine-guns, one million S.A.A. and a hundred cases of grenades landed at rendezvous. Handed over to Captain Flanagan. No interference. We got to sea again at six o'clock.*"

"*Good! Say, Maguire, who was that girl screeching just now?*"

"*She—oh, she's a—a hostage.*" The awkwardness of the reply was plainly evident. "*Some of the boys got loose—burnt a big house near by. Belonged to a Free Stater. I managed to save the girl.*"

"*She don't seem grateful.*" The voice at the other end was cynical. "*I shall have to report it. What's the name?*"

"*Connolly.*"

"My God!" I glanced round to George. He had sprang to his feet, was trembling violently in every limb. His face was ashen as he stared round at the cabin walls as though expecting to see through them with a vision enhanced to the equivalent of his hearing. "My God!—do you hear that?—Shh!" He stopped my half-uttered exclamation of bewilderment with a gesture of his quivering hand.

That far-off conversation was continuing.

"*What name?*"

"*Connolly—Eileen Connolly. I've got evidence to prove she's an enemy sympathiser.*" The speaker was evidently a little uncertain of the way his action was being received. "*Father was James Connolly.*"

George uttered a wild, inarticulate cry, sank back on to the cabin settee like a man who could no longer stand. His face frightened me.

"*What's happened to him?*"

"*He's dead,*" the voice came with a little, ugly laugh. "*The boys burnt him on his own bonfire.*"

"*A Free Stater, you say?*"

"*Sure. It's one less, anyway.*"

"*I'll report the matter. Hold your prisoner for instructions.*" The coldly official voice hinted at disapprobation. "*Your orders stand—you'll proceed to Hamburg and pick up the second consignment. Good night.*"

"*Good night.*"

The conversation ceased. There was silence. I turned to George. His face was ghastly, his eyes staring like those of a madman.

"It's her!" he said, ". . . . it's Eileen!"

"But who's Eileen?" I asked, bewildered. "Not——?" And then it flashed on me—my sister's friend! Eileen Connolly, of course—that flirtation of last winter!—the very name of George's yacht. "Good Lord!" I said, feebly. "I say, old man, I had no idea there was anything serious between you two."

"There isn't!" he snapped at me. "She refused me last winter.—My God!" he went on to himself, "Eileen! Eileen—in the hands of that murdering scoundrel!" He jumped to his feet, flung the earpieces from his head to the instrument-board, squirmed around the table to the few clear feet at the end of the cabin. I could only watch him helplessly as he paced up and down with his fists pressed hard against his temples. "Oh, I shall go mad in a minute!"

"But what has really happened?" I said.

"What?" He glared at me impatiently. "What's happened? You must be imbecile, man! It's all clear enough. That's a German gun-runner chartered by the Irish irregulars. Maguire's their agent on board. And the damned scoundrel's been doing a little raiding on his own account." He griped with both hands in the air. "If I could only get hold of him!" He took one or two more paces up and down, and then suddenly turned and flared at me. "My God, Dickie, don't sit there looking like a dummy! Don't you see that something's *got* to be done?" He was like a maniac.

"Yes, but what *can* we do?" I asked.

He stared at me, quietened suddenly.

"God knows!" he ejaculated, and sat down in a sudden

lassitude of despair upon the settee. "God knows!" he repeated, looking around him with hopeless vacuity. "God knows!" And he buried his face in his hands.

The silence in that little cabin, lit by the slightly oscillating oil-lamp, continued until I had to break the awful tension.

"George," I said, as quietly as I could, though I also found myself trembling with the excitement of this crisis that had come to us so suddenly out of the night, "if we're going to do anything about this, we must have clear brains for the problem. Hysterics won't help us."

He looked up, sobered. "You're right, Dickie," he said. "We must get our brains to work. I'm all right now." But he still shook like a man in a palsy, and his face was dreadful in its haggard pallor.

I dug out a bottle of whiskey I had brought in my suitcase, poured some into enamel mugs for both of us.

"Now," I said, "drink this, and get yourself steady."

He came to the table, drank it down at a gulp. Then he went again to the wireless set, fitted the receivers again over his ears, listened.

"Nothing," he said. "They've shut off. I thought perhaps——" He didn't say what 'perhaps' it was he thought, though I could guess. That girl's terror-stricken voice was still ringing in my ears, too.

He stared at me hopelessly.

"For God's sake, say something, Dickie!" he burst out, at last.

"I'm trying to think," I replied. "I daresay it's all plain enough to you—but it's anything but clear to me. I'm muddled. There's no doubt, of course, that it was a ship talking?"

"Bound for Hamburg—didn't you hear?" he said, irritably.

"Good. Well—whereabouts is she now?"

He got up, pulled out a chart from the locker. It comprised the southern coast of Ireland. There was a spot on it that had been well thumbed—as George's finger went to it now, I had a sudden vision of him brooding alone o'nights in that cabin, bringing himself into a sort of contact with that girl by contemplating on the chart the place

where she lived. I said nothing, waited for his words. He glanced up at the cabin clock.

"It's now nine," he said. "They put to sea at six. Three hours. She'd be a fast ship to dodge the patrols. Give her twelve knots. On a course for Hamburg, she'd be about here." He marked a spot on the chart where the fathom-figures were already sparse by comparison with those close to the coast.

"And how far away is that?" I asked.

He got out another chart, placed it upon the table contiguous with the first, measured with a pair of dividers from the indicated point to the Lizard on the second chart.

"About 160 miles."

"She'd pass close here, I suppose?"

"Yes." He made a mental calculation. "About ten o'clock to-morrow—if she does twelve knots. About one, if she's only a ten-knotter. But—" he looked up from the chart to me, "even if she does, how the devil are we going to stop her? We're not a torpedo boat."

"No," I said, filled with a great idea, "but there are plenty of torpedo-boats at Plymouth. Can't we communicate with the authorities? Surely they would stop the ship?"

His brows puzzled over the suggestion.

"We could talk to the authorities all right," he agreed, "but I'm sure it would be no good. This is an Irish matter—and who bothers about the Irish these days? I don't think the British Government would interfere. They're only too anxious to let the Irish settle their own affairs. They'd merely suspect us of laying a trap to mix them up in a row—what the Irregulars have been playing for ever since the Free State started." I wondered at George's knowledge of these matters, and then remembered that he had the best of reasons for close interest. "Much more likely to send a torpedo-boat round to watch *us*" he concluded.

It seemed a hopeless problem, and I remarked as much.

"It's maddening!" said George. "But" —he glared at me as though I were responsible for our impotence— "somehow or other I'm going to get her off that ship!"

He listened again with the receivers over his head, and I imitated him. There was no sound, except the flapping of ropes overhead, thrashing against the mast in a wind that had sprung up without our noticing it.

" It's not commencing to blow, is it? " I queried, uneasily.

George did not answer. All his faculties were absorbed in listening for a sound to come out of the silent night that encompassed our little craft. I imagined that distant ship, 160 miles away, throbbing through the dark sea, with that girl aboard of her. " Tie her up ! " that brutal command re-echoed in me. I wondered in what part of the ship she was held prisoner. This thought led me to another. I voiced it.

" I wonder how she—how Miss Connolly got to the wireless ! " I said.

George snapped at me.

" Broke loose—didn't you hear that brute say so ? I expect she was hiding somewhere round the wireless house and heard that German fellow telephoning. Directly he went to fetch Maguire, she must have dodged in, run to the instrument and cried for help. Doesn't seem very difficult to me ! " he glared at me, scornfully. " I can see her doing it ! "

" And why did they telephone in plain speech, instead of the usual Morse ? " I went on, not rebuffed. I wanted to get a clear picture of the whole thing in my head.

" Oh, don't ask futile, silly ass questions ! " George looked as if he could hit me for this repeated interruption of the silence to which he strained his faculties. " Why shouldn't they use plain speech ? They're on a wave-length that nobody uses—there's no likelihood of anyone listening-in. Can you hear anything now ? Of course you can't—and we're on the thirty-thousand length. There's nothing doing on it—they've got it all to themselves. They might be talking from one star to another. And unless they use cipher, there's no sense in using Morse. Anyone can pick up Morse. But it's much more convenient to talk straight out—less chance of mistakes. They can talk direct without bothering about operators." George was irritably voluble once he started to explain, evidently trying to save

time by answering in one complete reply any future stupid questions I might be going to put to him. "You exercise your wits on trying to think of some useful plan, Dickie—and don't worry me with things that don't matter!"

I don't know how long we had sat there in gloomy, baffled silence, when suddenly—I can't recall by what obscure path of thought I had come to it—I found myself contemplating a possibility.

"George," I said, on an impulse. "Can't you talk to that ship?"

"Talk to the ship?" He puzzled at me.

"Yes." I was suddenly all excitement. "Talk to the ship—bluff them—tell them to hand their prisoner over to us. She's passing close by to-morrow morning."

He jumped up with such impetuosity as to hit his head against the cabin roof.

"By Jove, Dickie!" he cried. "You've hit it!" He tore off the telephone receivers from his head. "Keep listening—in case they speak again. I'll start up the motor."

I stopped him before he had got out of the cabin.

"Wait a minute, George!" I spoke with the confident authority of the accepted strategist. My brain was working rapidly now. "Don't telephone yet, whatever you do. Those people in Ireland may be listening. We don't want them butting in. Wait till after midnight. They will probably have gone to bed, but there's certain to be someone on duty on the ship."

"Dickie!" he said admiringly, "you're a genius!" He glanced at the clock. "Two hours." He looked at me, and the sudden excitement faded out of his face. "But—man!—two hours!—How am I going to wait two mortal hours cooped up here? I shall go mad!"

"No, you won't," I said, firmly. I fished a pack of cards out of my suitcase. "You are going to pour us out a little more whiskey—not too much—and play a nice quiet game of piquet with me to pass the time."

He recovered control over himself.

"All right," he agreed. "But keep those earpieces on. We mustn't miss any messages."

For the next two hours—they seemed an eternity—we sat there, alert for any sound in our ears, playing the most uninteresting game of piquet I have ever sat through in my life. Not a murmur came to us through the instrument. Only the three glowing electric-light bulbs reassured us that it was still receptive. Despite the headpieces, we could converse fairly easily, and there were many lapses in our game while we discussed the exact message George was to send to that German gun-runner. In other lapses, too, he told me, shyly and clumsily, something of his feelings for that girl. She was quite evidently the one thing in life that mattered to him. ' It was only natural, of course, that she wouldn't marry a chap like him.' And since he could not have her he had hidden himself away on his yacht from a world that had become distasteful to him.

" If ever you fall in love, Dickie," he said, looking at me with honest, simple eyes, " you'll understand how much a chap wants to be alone. I only invited you because you knew her and could talk about her."

" Many thanks ! " said I, ironically.

Overhead, the cordage drummed against the mast in sharp little puffs of wind.

" I'm afraid we're in for dirty weather to-morrow," said George, with an anxious glance at the barometer.

We continued our dreary game, forgotten for long intervals in George's halting confidences. " She'll never have me, of course," he said, resignedly and miserably.

" Your call," I reminded him.

We were half through a hand, when suddenly he flung down the cards, sprang from his seat.

" Midnight, thank God ! Now we can get busy ! "

In a moment he had disappeared up the companion steps. A minute or two later I heard and felt the jerky throbbings of the motor as it whirred and flagged and whirred again in its first uneven revolutions. A nauseating atmosphere of paraffin invaded the little cabin. The motor settled into a steady hum where everything vibrated. George returned, wiping his hands on a bit of cotton waste.

He went to the wireless, fitted a mouthpiece to a gadget in front of him, manipulated a few more tiny switches.

Then, putting on his receivers, he sat down to it again. I drew close, listening also, my heart thumping with excitement.

"Hallo—*Adler!* Hullo—*Adler!*" He leaned forward, spoke into the mouthpiece. I could see perspiration glistening on his forehead. "Hullo—*Adler!*" He switched to receive the reply.

There was no response. George glanced at me—a quick, scared look. My thought was the same as his. Supposing there was no one listening on board that ship!

"Hullo—*Adler—Adler!—Adler!*" He fumbled a little with his tiny levers, altering them a trifle at each utterance of the call. "*Adler!—Adler!—Adler!*" Again he flicked down the switch which permitted the reply to reach us.

It came—startling us both with its uncanny loudness of direct address.

"*Ja, ja,* Adler—*ja. Wer ist's?*"

"*Adler*—R.H.Q. speaking. Fetch Mr. Maguire. *Herr Maguire bringen!*" He turned to me, whispered: "What's 'at once'?" '*Sofort—augenblicklich,*" I whispered back. "*Sofort—augenblicklich!*" he commanded peremptorily into the telephone.

"*Ja, ja—he sleep—I go wake him,*" came the answer, distinct despite the throbbing of the motor behind us.

George turned to me, the telephone switched off for safety.

"I daren't ask to speak to her, I suppose?"

I shook my head.

"Too risky."

We waited, through long minutes of silence.

Then again a voice came to us, gruffly bad-tempered.

"*Hullo—hullo—who's that speaking?*"

George's face went grim and hard as he bent forward to reply. It was as if he felt himself face to face with the owner of that now familiar voice.

"R.H.Q." he said, sharply, authoritatively. "Is that Maguire?"

"*Yes. Is that Cassidy?*"

"No, it isn't." George, as he explained to me afterwards,

tried to speak with the brusque peremptoriness of a war-time 'brass-hat.' "This is Intelligence speaking. Q Branch reports that you have a prisoner on board—a Miss Connolly. She is urgently required at H.Q. for examination. A most important prisoner. She is to be handed over without delay. In the meantime, you will be held personally responsible for her safety."

"*Oh,*" said Maguire, there was a trace of disappointment in his tone, "*shall we put back then?*"

"No." George made a gesture of 'Heaven forbid!' to me. "What time do you pass the Lizard to-morrow?"

"*I don't know.*"

"Go and find out from the captain!" George's tone could not have been bettered by the most important of staff-officers.

There was a pause in which we listened to nothing but the throb of our own motor working the dynamo.

"*About eleven,*" said the voice suddenly.

"Very well. Tell the captain to go close in to the Lizard. You will be met by a small yawl, flying the signal-flags R—H—Q. Answer with the same flags, and then send your prisoner aboard of her."

"*But who am I to hand her over to?*"

"Agents of ours. We've already arranged. All you have to do is to obey your orders." We were fairly safe in assuming that he would not query what to him would be merely another of the mysterious ramifications of the Irregular organisation. "Just repeat, please."

The voice repeated the instructions.

"Very good," said George. "Remember—on no account miss that yawl. It might have the gravest consequences—and you will be held responsible. Good night."

"*Good night.*"

There was once more silence.

George turned to me.

"And now to wait till morning!" he said.

We agreed to take alternate watches at the wireless in case any further conversation took place with the *Adler.* George was to have first watch. Utterly wearied by my long day, I rolled myself in a blanket on the settee and was almost instantly asleep.

I woke to find the light of morning pouring through the skylight and George no longer there. The place shook with the throbbing of the motor and the yacht was pitching heavily. I could hear the thud and splash of seas upon the deck. Mystified, I made my way, lurching and scrambling, to the companion-stairs, climbed out. George, still wearing the telephone-receivers attached by a long wire which went down into the cabin, was in oilskins, steering the yacht through a smother of spray. No sails were hoisted. She was running on the motor.

"Had to clear out!" he shouted at me. "Weather's been worsening since dawn. Not a word from the *Adler*. Take the tiller while I get a rag of canvas up. We've got sea-room now and can heave-to for a bit."

It was a foul morning. A heavy westerly wind drove a grey wrack of mist and rain over a livid green sea that leaped and boiled at us as our motor thudded us through it. The Lizard was a cloudlike mass only faintly to be discerned far astern of us. I kept the *Eileen* bows-on to the sea while George, having put on my head the receivers he had been wearing, struggled with the canvas. At last, close-reefed and helm lashed, the engine stopped, we hove-to for a mouthful of cold breakfast down in the cabin.

He had looked pretty bad the night before. This morning he looked ghastly, dark rings under his eyes, his features pale and drawn. He had not had a wink of sleep.

"No sense in waking you, old chap," he said. "I couldn't have slept anyhow."

It was an interminable and miserable time waiting for that ship. George lent me a suit of oilskins and with the receivers on the long wire over my ears I sat on the cabin steps and talked to him while he steered. "Don't leave them off for a moment," he had said. "We mustn't miss a word if they speak. I'll navigate the yacht."

Directly after breakfast, he had set a course for a point just off the Lizard and then, in heavy, blinding squalls of rain, buffeted by a sea that grew worse every minute, we cruised up and down in the vicinity of the spot where we might expect to meet the *Adler*. Our three signal-flags blew stiffly out from the halliards.

" There she is ! " cried George suddenly.

Out of the mist emerged a small and dirty-looking tramp-steamer, the black smoke blowing forward over her bows as she wallowed in the following sea. I stood up on the cabin-steps to look at her, saw three flags run up to her signal-halliards.

George put the helm over and we came round, beating up towards her, manœuvring to get under her lee.

" She's stopping ! " said George. " Look !—they're getting ready a boat ! " I could, in fact, see a little group of figures busy about one of the davits.

George set the motor on at full power, and pitching and plunging under close-hauled canvas among the waves that crashed over our bows, we came close to her. She had now stopped, was squattering amid creamy-white foam. From her deck men were scrambling into the boat still slung upon the davits.

" There's Eileen ! "

George's eyes were quicker than mine, but I also now saw a muffled-up figure hurried by two men along the deck and pushed into the boat. Then they began to lower away. Breathlessly we watched the boat descend on the lengthening ropes, swinging and swaying sickeningly as the steamer lurched and wallowed in the waves. At last it touched the water, was out of sight for a moment, while the davit ropes, released, streamed on the wind.

" Here they come ! "

The boat rose on the sea, four oarsmen rowing for all they were worth. Steadily it approached, out of sight one moment, hoisted high the next. In the stern-sheets I could see two figures ; one of them, certainly, the girl. George brought the yacht up to the wind, kept her steady with the motor at half-speed.

The boat was a little more than half-way to us when suddenly a voice spoke into my very ear.

" *Hullo,* Adler ! *Hullo,* Adler ! "

Intent on watching the approach of the boat from my position on the cabin-steps, I had forgotten that the wireless receivers were still over my ears.

" *Hullo,* Adler ! "

"They're calling, George!" I cried. "Calling up the *Adler!*"

He glanced at me, but said nothing. I saw his face set hard as he measured with his eye the distance yet between ourselves and the boat.

"*Ja, ja*—Adler!—*Wer ist's?*" came the reply.

"*R.H.Q. Where's Mr. Maguire?*"

"*Herr Maguire—he vos in boat.*"

"*Boat? What do you mean?—I want to talk to him. Fetch him at once. Orders for his prisoner tell him!*"

The other voice commenced an explanation in broken English.

"Never mind what they're saying!" shouted George. "Take those things off and stand by to help her out of the boat. I can't leave the helm."

I did as I was told. The highly-interesting conversation between 'R.H.Q.' and the *Adler* ceased for me abruptly. I could only guess at its purport by the figure I saw dart out of the wireless house and run to the officer on the bridge. A moment later, the propeller of the ship began to revolve and I saw a wisp of white steam blow away from halfway up her funnel. The melancholy wail of her syren drifted across to us.

"They've discovered the trick, George!" I shouted, in alarm.

"Never mind!" he said. "It's too late now! Stand by to pull her on board."

The boat rose on a wave just in front of us. The men had ceased rowing, were looking back at the ship, puzzled at her signal. The yacht was under way, and the next instant, swung by a deft touch on her tiller, was grinding alongside the ship's boat. A couple of men clutched at the rope we had slung ready alongside. Once more the steamer's syren hooted long and loud. She was moving through the water now, coming straight towards us.

"All right!" I shouted to the man in the stern-sheets. "There's a destroyer coming up—that's all. She wants you to get back as soon as possible. Pass up the girl!"

There was no time for hesitation with the two boats grinding against one another in that sea. He did the

instinctive thing, hoisted the girl upright by main force—she drooped as though she were half-fainting—and, seizing the moment, pushed her into my grasp. I dragged her on deck in a tumbled heap.

"All clear!" I shouted, but George had not waited for my word. He set the motor to full speed, put the helm over, loosed the mainsheet ready to his hand. The yacht whipped round like a top. I just heard an angry shout from the boat's crew—and then we were already distant from them.

The steamer was coming for us as though she meant to run us down, sounding her syren in quick and angry blasts.

"Don't matter about them!" cried George, as the yacht flew on before the wind. "They'll be half-an-hour picking up their boat's crew—and we're well away. Look after *her!*"

I bent over the girl. She lay huddled upon the deck, staring at me with a face blanched with terror. Then she looked at the man at the helm.

"*George!*" she cried.

Behind us the *Adler* was blotted out in a squall. The *Eileen* changed course slightly, raced, like a living thing, for safety.

A MOTHER SITS BY THE FIRE

A MOTHER SITS BY THE FIRE

A CLOCK struck six in thin, silvery notes, somewhere in the darkness of the fitfully illuminated room. Outside, a winter-wind rattled the window-panes. The sounds made no impression on her consciousness. She sat withdrawn from contact with the world, her eyes fixed on the glowing heart of the fire where she forgot she looked. She forgot where she was, lost the sense of time in a reverie where the past re-enacted itself so vividly as to obscure the present. Only, like a part of herself, not needing the verification of a glance, was she conscious of the baby she had rocked to sleep in the cradle by the side of her chair, one hand still drooping pendent towards it. There was a brimming spring of happiness in her heart.

Her thoughts seemed to exteriorise themselves as they played, released from check, in front of her dreamy mind. She looked at them rather than thought them, saw them curiously vivid—flitting glimpses of that quiet, well-ordered household beyond the closed door that for a month she had had to trust to function without her direction—of that moment (how far back it seemed!—not just a month, surely!) when Rudolph's strong arm had supported her up the staircase and she had fought down the fluttering fear of the woman who knows her hour is come—of doctors and nurses—of memories she would not look at, already half-obliterated—of the doctor's face smiling at her from a cloud of pain that had suddenly broken: "You have your boy!"; she would hear his voice as long as she lived—of that inexpressible moment when she had first looked down at the little bundle close against her side, had seen the tiny little strange face, miraculously alive,

miraculously owing its life to her! The fire went blurry through inexplicable tears.

There came another vision—Rudolph bending over the beribboned cradle, while she watched him from the bed, in a curious suspense for his first word of comment. He looked to her, spoke, sententious as ever. "Looks all right!" If only he could have been just a tiny bit enthusiastic! He had come across to her, looked in her eyes with that funny look of his. "And now you have got everything in the world you want, old lady!" Had she? She pondered Rudolph.

Were all married couples like that! she wondered. Sometimes they seemed so close together—and then they went poles asunder, unbridged gulfs between them. It was disconcerting. Her heart chilled as she realised how much of a stranger he was sometimes, a stranger she repelled with a little aversion she would not admit to herself. Was it her fault? It had not been like that when the baby was coming. They had been so closely knit that it seemed nothing could sever them. But since—it seemed a stranger who had kissed her that morning, told her she was still young and very, very beautiful, and she had broken from his arms at a murmur from the cradle. He ought to understand! She dismissed the thought of Rudolph, stifled a funny little uneasiness of conscience in herself.

Nothing should interfere with her enjoyment of this hour. Only too rarely did nurse go out, leave her to undisturbed solitude with that gurgling baby who was her very, very own. She thrilled at the realisation. In a few days now the duties of life would begin again for her. But for the moment she was free—free to steep herself in the quiet ecstasy of happy motherhood. He stirred; slept again. She stared into the fire, saw visions.

What would he be this boy of hers? Clever, of course, like his father—big, strong, handsome—chivalrous to women. She saw men admiring him, giving him that blunt man's-friendship that, womanlike, she could never get quite to understand. She saw him over-topping, out-shining, them all. She imagined careers for him—abandoned them one after another at the moment of success as insufficiently

successful. But, whatever he was—however dazzlingly distinguished from his fellows, he was still her boy, her boy who came to his mother with loving, grateful eyes, sharing his life with her, as happily proud of her as she was of him.

The bundle in the cradle stirred again. She looked down upon it with wet, shining eyes, slipped a finger into the tight clutch of that tiny hand.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!" She shook her head at him as though to tease him, her voice a loving murmur. "Do you know why I called you Peter? It was very, very wicked of your wicked mother. I said to myself as I first looked at you—'thou art Peter, and on this rock I build my—happiness!"

. . . . . .

The last of them had gone. The sudden quietness closed on her. As she turned from the door, a strange woman, in unrelieved black to her throat, moved in the wall-mirror, caught her eyes. She stared at her for a moment before self-recognition dawned in her semi-paralysed mind. She sat down abruptly in the shock of renewed realisation, buried her face in her hands. Rudolph!—Rudolph!

Yet she could not weep. After a timeless lapse, where her soul reeled through blackness, her hands pressed convulsively tight upon the eyes that burned against her brain, she raised her head, her fingers hot and dry as she dropped them from her brow. She sat immobile, staring in front of her. The ghosts of hallucinations played over her fevered senses, brain-echoes of familiar sounds that startled her with their unreal reality—the quick, firm footfall of a man who springs upstairs, her own name called cheerily from the door. She listened, in spite of herself. Where should have been those familiar tones, there was a void of sound. She would never hear them again.

She would never hear that step—that voice—again. Never again would she see that face which almost limned itself before her eyes and disappeared bafflingly before she could attain visualisation. She had seen it for the

last time before they carried out that wooden case. Rudolph !—Rudolph ! She looked toward his photograph, unable to credit that a human being could disappear so utterly, her brain numbed in the presence of the mystery of death.

The door opened stealthily. A shock of short, fair curls, a pair of wondering blue eyes, came cautiously through the gap at a level with the handle. She sat motionless, as though under a mantle of ice that held her prisoned, staring with dry eyes into a futurity that was blank.

" Mummy ! " There was a rush of little feet across the room. A pair of warm little arms flung themselves impulsively round her neck. A little face came close against hers, cheek against cheek, snuggling to her. " Mummy ! You do want me, don't you ? Nursie said you didn't ! "

She looked at him, and frozen fountains broke up in her. The ice vanished from the arms that clasped him instinctively.

" Peter ! Peter boy ! " Her voice came with the first sob of that emotion that had been frost-dammed in her. " I want you more—much more—than ever I did ! "

" Mummy ! *Darling* mummy ! " He hugged and kissed her in happy re-assurance.

There was a little silence while she held him close. He looked up at her.

" Mummy ! When is Daddy going to be better ? "

She must tell him ! The task terrified her.

" Peter dear—Daddy is better—but he has gone—gone right away—with the angels." She swallowed.

She had expected a wild, convulsive outburst of grief. He looked at her in grave surprise.

" Daddy won't come back ? " he asked.

She shook her head, scarcely able to speak.

" No, dear."

Her emotion touched him to a consolatory indignation.

" Mummy ! " He threw himself close against her. " Mummy ! I won't go away from you. I won't leave you —ever ! Mummy darling, you've still got me ! "

A flood came up in her—an immense gratitude. A vow

registered itself, sacred for life. She crushed him to her passionately, pressed her lips speechlessly upon his curly head

He looked up to her, protestingly.

"Mummy!—you're crying on me!"

She smiled at him.

. . . . . .

She looked out of the window of the little house in the half-built suburban road. A receding motor-car swung round the corner, disappeared. She was trembling. The man's voice, pleasantly masculine in its persuasive appeal, still rang in her ears. She found herself looking at a memory of his strong face, his sympathetic eyes. How they had lit up when she had come into the room whither the little maid-servant had shown him! And she had never suspected—Geoffrey Dane, Rudolph's friend!—his executor who for these seven long years had so loyally watched over her little capital without a hint that he was more than a friend to her! He was suddenly different.

Something stirred in the depths of her. She almost yielded to the impulse to look in the mirror, to see whether she was still as young and good-looking as, smiling at her self-deprecation, he had said she was. Could she be happy with him? The answer was an instinctive affirmative. She contemplated the strangeness of it; fitted, tentatively, the new name to herself—Mrs. Dane.

"I shall hope while you think it over," he said, as he departed. Yet she had given him little grounds for hope. What had withheld her? Rudolph? Rudolph was shadowy in her memory, needed a glance at his photograph to be questioned with any certitude. No reproach for disloyalty looked at her from the frame. He would probably have counselled her to accept. She turned again to the window, looked for Peter, already overdue from afternoon school.

Peter! That was the touchstone. Not for herself, but for Peter, she must decide. For her the world held only one reality—that twelve-year-old boy whose mere step outside the door made her heart beat faster. Other

existences were but shadows, of significance only in so far as they ministered to him. He was a good boy, she told herself, even if he was a little wild. She was glad he was not precociously clever—those precocious boys never did anything when they grew up. There was nothing soft about him. Even while she winced under it, she admired the masterfulness of his spirit. No—that was not he coming round the corner. She wished he wouldn't be so late. One read of so many accidents!

Peter! . . . What would Peter say? More important, how would such a change affect Peter? Geoffrey Dane's words echoed in her, "I'll treat him as my own son." He was certainly a very wealthy man. But there might be later children of his own . . . It wasn't safe to count on money like that. Besides, anyway, Peter would have Rudolph's money. She had to pinch to keep the capital intact, but it was and would be intact for him. Money could not determine this problem.

There was another thing. It had been lurking in the back of her mind. She pulled it out now, bravely, and looked at it. "In any case, the boy ought to go away to school, you know."

Geoffrey Dane had said it kindly enough, but the words had rung an alarm-bell in her heart. Did he mean to separate them? . . . Part her from the boy to slip into his place? A blind antagonism had leaped up in her. He was apparently quite disinterested, however; concerned only with the boy's welfare. "It's not good for him to be brought up by a woman, particularly one who loves him perhaps too much!"

He had smiled at her. She could not love him too much—that was absurd!—but there was a truth in the first clause that would already have been familiar had she allowed herself to admit it. Peter needed discipline—a man's authority. But to send him away to the unknown hazards of a school!

The view from the window ceased to exist as she pondered the problem. She thrilled with a sudden solution. If—if she accepted, she could make a compromise. She would marry Geoffrey Dane on condition that she kept her boy!

With a man to hold him in hand, he need not go to boarding-school. If he was firm, Geoffrey Dane was justice itself, and always kind. It was the ideal influence. Peter never dared to be rude to her when Geoffrey Dane was present. She saw, suddenly, those sympathetic eyes looking at her as no man's eyes had looked at her since Rudolph died—and thrilled queerly with something that was more than gratitude. She slid off the burden of a responsibility that had grown too heavy for her—surrendered her tired self, in anticipation, to his arms. With him, life would be easy, happy. She smiled, unconsciously, as she had not smiled for years.

There he was! . . . Peter came round the corner, whistling jauntily, swinging his satchel, flinging it after a cat that fled from him. She hastened to warn the maid to prepare his tea.

She was in the dining-room when he entered—he hated to see her looking out for him. He knew that she frowned at his muddy boots, but affected a superb indifference.

"You are late, dear," she said as she kissed him.

He slipped from her embrace, dropped himself to a seat at the table.

"I was playing with some other chaps," he said, in a tone which indicated this was the limit of concession towards apology.

The meal commenced. She watched him as he ate, hungrily. She must tell him. But how? A nervous flutter within her almost inhibited speech. She made the effort.

"Mr. Dane has been here this afternoon, Peter," she said, trying to keep her voice normal.

He did not look up from the jam to which he helped himself.

"That chap seems always to be loafing round here lately." His tone was that gruff ungraciousness which he knew hurt her. "Anyone would think he was after you, mother."

She was silent. He looked up, disconcertingly suspicious eyes on her.

"I say, mother, that's not what he's after, is it?" he said, sharply. "I don't want any rotten step-father!"

She could not answer. She bit her lip, her eyes filling with tears.

The sight of them touched the better nature in him. He jumped up from his chair, came round to her impulsively, put his arms around her neck.

"Sorry, mother." What a big understanding boy he was! "But you don't surely mean you want to marry Mr. Dane?"

She looked up at him through her tears.

"Peter—Peter dear—I—oh, I don't know!"

He embraced her tightly, squeezed her resolution from her as he caressed her.

"Mother, don't be silly—you don't want to marry anyone. What on earth for? We don't want anyone else. I've got you—and you've got me. And that's all we want, isn't it? . . . just each other?"

She had a vision of a little curly-haired boy running to her in her grief, heard a childish voice: "Mummy darling, I won't leave you—ever!" A self-reproach came up in her; she smothered it for one last effort to be sure.

"Peter darling, don't you like Mr. Dane?"

"I can't stick him!" The answer was passionate in its vehemence.

It slammed a gate in her. She looked like a prisoner into those unrelenting young eyes above her.

"All right, Peter dear, I won't marry—anyone."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

He contemplated her for a moment.

"There's no need to look so miserable about it, mother. Can't you smile?"

She smiled.

He resumed his seat, reached for the bread-and-butter.

Another thought flashed into her, almost made her heart stop. Her compromise had failed!

She steadied her voice before she spoke.

"Peter dear, would you like to go to boarding-school?"

His face lit up.

"Rath-er!"

. . . . . .

He was so big, so authoritative, that a fear of him mingled with her love. As he sat there, puffing irritably at his pipe, she could not reconcile him with the thought that once she had held him in her lap. His angry words still rang in her ears.

"I know you'd like to make a milk-sop of me, mother—but it can't be done!"

Was she wrong to try and curb him, to try and guide him? For all the twenty-two years of which he was so conscious, he was still only a boy. She despaired at his resentment of her feeble effort to use an unaccustomed authority. Had she done right in sending him away from her to boarding-school, to the University?

The first, yes; but the second——? Mr. Dane had disapproved of it, had prophesied the extravagances, the depletions of her capital that it made her tremble to remember. He had been ashamed to bring his college friends to the little house. Behind a closed door in her memory were long hours of lonely tears. She had no resentment. She gloried in these sacrifices if they had been for his good. But had they been? A cold fear gripped her heart as she watched his jaunty assumption of a man of the world.

She was frightened for him. Surely a University education ought to have facilitated his start in life! It was true he had not specialised, had no particular qualifications. But he ought to have made powerful friends. Her mind turned abruptly from this subject. She knew none of Peter's friends, imagined them only with dread from the hints that escaped him. If only he would not be so big in his ideas, would be content to make a beginning with whatever work he could find! At the same time she sympathised with the humiliation of his pride she herself had counselled. A secret resentment sharpened itself in her. Considering all things, Mr. Dane might well have offered him more than an ordinary junior clerkship in his office.

He looked at her. It was as if he read her thought.

"And if you think I'm going to quill-drive in old Dane's office, you're mistaken, mother!"

She found her voice.

"What do you propose to do, then, Peter?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, something will turn up! I'm sure to get a chance—a real chance—presently. That's if you don't spoil it!"

She blanched under the stab.

"Peter dear—do I spoil your chances for you?"

It was as though she bared her breast for him.

He shifted his glance uncomfortably, shielded himself under bad-temper.

"You're spoiling this one. Just because of the miserable money!"

Mr. Dane's warning voice sounded in her ear like that of a watching spirit.

"It would mean selling more stock, Peter," she said, quietly.

He glared at her.

"Oh, of course, mother—if you're always going to throw that old business in my face! You know perfectly well a man couldn't live in my college on my allowance!"

His eyes dropped under her steady look.

"Have I ever reminded you, Peter?" she said, gently. "I don't want to remember it. But I do want to understand what sort of a chance this is, if it is a chance."

"I don't say it's a chance now, but it's pretty sure to lead to one. A fellow like Jack Freeman hears of all sorts of good things—and I should be a fool to refuse this chance of a trip with him."

Her eyes probed him.

"Jack Freeman's father is a millionaire, Peter, I know—but is your friend likely to hear of good things for you in Paris?"

He flushed.

"Well, I don't say this is a business trip, mother—it's just a jolly party. It gives me a chance to see a bit of the world, and it keeps me in the social set of useful people like Jack Freeman, Herman Morris and the others."

"Herman Morris is going too?" Her tone was sharp with alarm.

"Yes." Obviously, he could have bitten off his tongue, for this unlucky slip, but she noted, with a sudden gratitude, that still he could not lie to her. All through his boyhood, this had been her touchstone.

"Peter, after that chorus-girl case—would you like to introduce Herman Morris to your mother?"

She saw the colour heighten round his eyes.

"I'm not responsible for other people's morals, mother—neither are you!"

A sudden, dreadful suspicion flashed into her. She rose, without knowing it, from her chair.

"Peter, tell me the truth. Will there be *only* men in this party to Paris?"

He did not answer.

She felt as though she were going to faint. The room went round her in the instant before she mastered herself, found the support of a chair-back.

"Peter—Peter——" Speech failed her.

He also rose, flamed out with that sudden anger of his.

"Look here, mother—you don't seem to realise that I am a grown man. You can't treat me any longer like a child!"

Her eyes never left his face.

"And—and you would break into our capital for—for that?"

"I tell you—I'm not a boy. I'm a man—and I'm going to run my own life as I like! I know what I'm doing."

She summoned up all her courage, fought off the dizziness.

"And if I refuse—refuse to give you this money?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There are people who will lend it to me. It is better that you should understand, mother. I am out of leading strings."

She clutched at one last hope.

"And if I ask you—beg of you—not to go?"

His answer was coldly brutal.

"I am sorry, mother, but I have already promised."

"You are going—in any case?"

"In any case. I am of age. I claim my liberty, mother."

She took a deep, trembling breath, difficult in the anguish that seemed like a cramp upon her heart, looked at this stranger—this stranger who was her Peter—in a despair that had no words. For this moment of repudiation she had sacrificed her entire life. The mockery of it smote her. She craved to fall dead, and the mercy was withheld. Peter !—her child Peter had gone like a dream from which one wakes. With an inarticulate cry, she went, seeing nothing, out of the room.

It was her bedroom to which she went like an automaton, obeying a blind instinct to be alone with her hurt. She fumbled with one hand out along the bed—and then suddenly she went down on her knees, her face between her hands. She prayed. She prayed as in all her life she had never prayed before. She had given him all this earthly existence of hers—what more could she give him ? The thought flashed into her.

" Oh God, do with my soul as thou wilt, but save him ! "

Prayer ceased in her, but still she knelt with hands over her face. Thought awoke suddenly, moved with an unexperienced swiftness and lucidity, leaping from an echo of his words still audible in her. He was a grown man ! He was no longer a child. She had trusted him insufficiently —had thought to keep him in those leading-strings he resented. A sudden resolve formed itself in her. She would trust him, to the extreme of completeness ! If she could not thus trust him, life were better ended for her. He claimed to be a man—she would give him his chance to prove it.

She rose to her feet, went to the writing-desk in the corner of her room, sat down to it, took a sheet of paper and wrote.

" *Dear Mr. Dane,*

" *Will you please take this as authority to transfer to Peter all the securities you hold for me ? I feel that now he is of man's age he should undertake a man's responsibility——*"

She looked round sharply in the sudden, instinctive

knowledge of a presence at her back. It was Peter, looking over her shoulder.

"—*I have implicit trust in him.*" Her pen flew over the paper. She signed her name. Then she turned to Peter handed him the letter, speechlessly, trying to keep her hand still. He pushed it back.

"No, mother," he said. She stared at him. There was a new tone in his voice. "I've had enough of your money." He spoke evidently with an effort, overcame a shamefacedness for which she loved him. "I want to tell you something. I've been thinking—and I've decided to go into Mr. Dane's office if he'll have me."

She sprang to her feet, was held, a little thing, in his big strong arms.

"Peter!"

"And, mother," he looked down into her eyes, checked, boyishly diffident of the words that meant so much to her, "I've not played the game to you, the best little mother in the world. Forgive me for making you unhappy."

"Peter! Peter darling!" she said, the tears streaming down her face, "it's the happiest moment of my life!"

. . . . . .

She smiled happily as, duster in hand, she went over the little house, the last touch given. It was a picture of domestic neatness, fresh and pretty with its new curtains against the sun. She wondered what Peter would say when he saw it; imagined herself in the hug of his arms, held there for the good-humoured, affectionate reproach, "Mother, you work too hard!"

But he would be pleased. She was innocently excited at the surprise it would be for him. She had been wise to persuade him to go away alone for that month. He deserved a real holiday, free from the constraint her presence inevitably laid on him. He had had a hard time at the office. He was an important man there, now. Mr. Dane was pleased with him, had hinted, on one of those rare occasions when she saw her old friend, at a possible partnership in the future. Her mind leaped back years to a dreadful

evening when Peter had hesitated at what she now saw to have been cross-roads. She could scarcely identify that rebellious boy with the steady-eyed young man who had kissed her good-bye. Eight years! He had made good from the start.

She thrilled with pride in him, reverted to that possible partnership. That would mean more money—Peter would probably want a larger, more fashionable house. She looked affectionately at the little home about her, imagined removal from it with regret. So much of her life had been passed there and, looking back, it seemed a happy life. She would be well-satisfied to live there all her years—with Peter.

With Peter—but suppose (she forced herself to admit it as an academic possibility against the instinctive revolt of her mind), suppose Peter married! She saw herself fleeing as into the wilderness. She could not live alone in that house haunted by all their happy days together.

She banished the unworthy thought. Of course, she would be glad if he found a wife—a *good* wife. She stopped and contemplated, under pretext of dusting it, the photograph of him in her bedroom. Perhaps it would never happen. He was still her boy, bless him! the boy who had kept his childish promise, had never left her. He had told her once that she was the only woman in the world who meant anything to him. She kissed the glass over his dear face.

There was his key in the lock! She hid the duster, glanced to see if she was tidy for him. What would he say to the clean, new-pin aspect of the house, to the new curtains? She could scarcely wait in anticipation of his surprise, of his first words of praise. She heard the maid tell him she was upstairs, heard his quick tread as he leaped up the staircase. He burst into the room, curiously boyish, his face all smiles.

"Hallo, mother!"

"Peter dear!" She was in his arms. "You have enjoyed yourself?"

"Heaps!" He looked down at her. "Little mother, I've something to show you downstairs."

A present, perhaps? Dear boy! She smiled at him.

"I had something to show you, too—upstairs and down, Peter." He looked puzzled. "Don't you notice anything?"

He glanced around him, shook his head.

"No. It all looks just the same." He saw the disappointment in her face. "What is it, mother? Sorry I'm dense!"

"Never mind, dear." She would let him discover for himself; it was only a pleasure deferred. One couldn't expect a man to notice domestic things at once.

"Well, come downstairs, then. I've got a surprise for you."

She let herself be led, with his arms around her, to the staircase; descended to the turn of the stairs. She stopped suddenly as though a sword had gone through her. Standing in the hall was a girl, at first glance young and pretty under her summer hat.

She turned to him. "Peter!" But Peter had already leaped down the stairs, was leading the girl towards her. She forced herself to continue her descent. It was as though the earth quaked and opened.

Peter was speaking.

"Forgive me for not writing to you about it, mother. I wanted it to be a great surprise for you." He radiated a happiness that could see nothing beyond itself. "This is Ruth. I want you to love her—for she has promised to be my wife!"

She looked at the girl's face, met a pair of soft brown eyes.

"Mrs. Harcourt," the girl's voice was sympathetic, on a note that disarmed antagonism, "I told Peter he ought to have written to you." She called him Peter already! "Can you forgive me?"

Peter threw his arms round both of them, pulled them together. He laughed boyishly.

"Forgive? Nonsense! What has mother to forgive? We're all going to be happy together—the three of us—happier than we've been in our lives, aren't we, mother?"

She found herself holding the girl's hand as she looked

into those brown eyes for discovery of the real woman behind that pretty face. Peter's happiness depended on that unknown. Suddenly she bent forward, took her in her arms with a kiss that sanctioned.

"Be good to him, dear," she said.

Peter looked down at her wet eyes, his enthusiasm dashed a little.

"You're pleased, mother, aren't you?"

She achieved a heroic smile to reassure him.

"Yes, dear."

She led the girl into the drawing-room, left them on the pretext of ordering the tea. Peter followed her out.

"You *are* pleased, mother, aren't you?" He held her shoulders with his big strong hands as his eyes questioned her. "You'll love her when you know her. Don't think you're losing me. You'll often come and stay with us when we're married—and it'll be like old times again."

She turned a mute face up to him for his kiss.

"Go back to her, dear," she managed to say.

She invented pretexts to linger in that kitchen. Not for some minutes could she nerve herself for the ordeal of seeing them together—and then, suddenly, she could not stay away.

She went along to the drawing-room. The door was half-open. Peter's voice, a strange new tone in it, arrested her on the threshold. He held his affianced in his arms, looking up to him as he looked down to her.

"There's never been any real thing in my life till now, dearest," he said, as he bent down for the meeting of their lips.

On his face was a look his mother had never seen.

She crept away into the next room, pretty with the new curtains, sank into a chair, sobbed suddenly as though her heart would break.

. . . . . .

Her thoughts ran on. It seemed a long way back now, that pretty little house where Peter had grown up from babydom to manhood. It was lonely in this diminutive apartment whither she had removed the little furniture

she had not given Peter for his home. He rarely visited her. Weeks passed without his seeing her while she sat and listened for that sharp ring at the bell which should announce his presence. She did not blame him. He worked hard at the office, and after business Ruth of course liked to have him. They almost never came together. Ruth pointed her temporary relinquishment by allowing him to come alone when he did come.

It was very lonely, and as she sat she wondered whether it had all been worth while. She looked back along a vista of sacrifice—of sacrifices of which Peter knew nothing, or had long ago forgotten. All her own life she had immolated for him, and at the end he thought (it was right that he should, of course!) only of another woman. Had she married Geoffrey Dane all those years ago—she remembered Peter's petulant, childish jealousy to which she had weakly surrendered—she might have been sitting now by a companionable fireside, and Peter, married probably in any case, would not have been more lost to her than he was. Tears of self-pity came into her eyes. There was a pointless irony in life, she thought.

A resentment stirred in her. They lived selfish lives, Peter and Ruth, without a child to cement their home. It was Ruth's fault, of course (pleasure-loving little thing!). If she could have a little grandchild to prattle round her! She almost hated Ruth for withholding it.

. . . . . .

Seven o'clock struck in thin silvery notes from somewhere in the darkness. The fire had gone down. The winter-wind rattled at the window-panes. She bestirred herself, put on another log, switched on the light which revealed the dreary solitude of her room.

There was a sharp ring at the outer bell. Peter! Her heart leaped. She almost ran to the door, opened it. It was Peter but—she noted it with a little stab of disappointment—Ruth was with him.

Peter smiled at her, the affectionate old Peter!

"Ruth has something to tell you, mother," he said as he kissed her after she had closed the door behind them.

The pretty young wife nodded brightly to her, her face somehow more sympathetic than usual. The two women went into the bedroom for the younger to remove her hat and suddenly the daughter-in-law bent and whispered in her ear.

The old lady gave a start of joy.

" Oh, my dear, my dear ! " she cried, throwing her arms about her and kissing her in a sudden annihilation of all hostility. " I'm so glad ! I'm glad for you. A woman can't know what happiness is "—she smiled in an ecstasy of transfigured memory—" until she is a mother ! "

THE END

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